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IMAGERY AND THEME

IN

BROWNING'S MEN AND WOMEN

by



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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Imagery and Theme In Browning's "Men and Women", submitted by Shauna Murray in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I propose to discuss patterns of imagery in relation to central themes which they develop or reveal in Browning's Men and Women. In Chapter I various critical approaches which have been taken towards Browning in the past will be briefly considered, in order to stress the need for a re-evaluation of him as a poet. The main categories of imagery will then be introduced, namely animal and plant images and images from the Bible. Also, the themes of Incarnation and time will be viewed in the light of their relation to imagery. Chapter II will be devoted to a detailed examination of particular kinds of images falling within the main categories, with close readings of relevant passages in the poetry. Gradually, through emphasis upon certain emerging patterns, the way will be open in Chapter III for an extensive reading of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," a difficult poem in Browning's canon, which will illuminate the body of Men and Women. I shall move from Browning's "Childe Roland" to psychological and archetypal considerations only to substantiate and bring into focus what has already been discovered in the poetry, through the analysis of imagery and theme.

INTRODUCTION

"THIS DANCING RING . . ."

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also. (IV,173, 1-4)¹

With these lines, Robert Browning begins "One Word More," the epilogue to the fifty poems composing the volume Men and Women. In an imaginative sense, each poem is an individual progeny of the poet, and assumes a state of complex adulthood at its birth. In a more literal sense, the subjects of the poems are, almost without exception, men and women, in the infinite variety of their human situations. One critic of the Victorian poets writes:

The fact that for the edition of his poems in 1863 Browning retained the original title of his first three volumes of short pieces, [Dramatic Lyrics (1842), Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845), Men and Women (1855)] but completely redistributed their contents, is evidence enough that he did not attach² any significance to dates of composition within this body of work.

Whether this indeed is "evidence enough" may be open to question; as well, of course, we might question the need to know the poet's conscious intention at all. However, the scope of this thesis depends to an extent on there being some significance in the collection of fifty-one poems as it stands in 1855, when originally published.³ Our problem is to explore what it is, in terms of imagery and theme, which would justify these poems being seen as parts of a whole, while at the same time remaining individual and complete creations. Certainly, taking external evidence, there is little doubt that the majority of the poems were written within the ten-year period,

1846 to 1855, the Italian portion of Browning's literary career. Most are a product in some part of this sojourn in Italy, and the subject matter of the volume, "lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see . . ."⁴ according to Browning, is borne out in the poems as they appear. Italy, and specifically the Italy of the Renaissance, is a focussing point for Browning's inspiration at this time, as it will become apparent.

Internally, what provides the poetic unity or relationship of the poems in Men and Women? In tracing the imagery and major image patterns of the poems, not only will recurrences of images provide some cohesion, but the images will be shown to be integral with the central themes in this volume. Some of these themes have been acknowledged, and made the subject of much literary debate and scholarly interpretation, but others, less obvious, are only made evident through the imagery, although they underlie and perhaps counterpoint the intellectual, surface themes. It is only the particular and concrete in these poems, in diction and subject matter, which will lead to any possible generalization of theme or creative process. The contention here is that the message is as much in the fact of the emphasis on the particular, as it is contained in the nature of the themes of the poems. With only a few exceptions, the kind of approach to be taken here has been neglected with regard to Browning's poetry. Poetics has usually been placed in the shadow of his thought, although his spirit and inspiration have been praised. However profound his thought is judged to be, surely his "profundity" is, in evaluating him

as a poet, of second importance to his actual poetic qualities, said by some critics to be non-existent. This, then, is the reason for an imagistic reading of his poetry, in which we will be closely concerned with "the thing itself."

In any discussion of Browning, his concern with human character can never be neglected, nor will it be separated from the image patterns which emerge. The poems are about men and women. Without any doubt Browning can be seen as a poet who understands the psychology of man; in his emphasis on the individual, and the least typical people and situations as his choice of subject, he demonstrates his "modern" scientific insight in every poem. From an aesthetic perspective William Whitla makes the following observations about the development of Browning's use of personae in the period after Christmas-Eve and Easter Day, (thus including Men and Women):

The persona is very carefully selected to represent just what Browning is trying to say in each situation. He is himself the symbol, the 'fleshification,' the incarnation . . . of Browning's idea By means of the dramatic situation the poet is able to probe not only the character, psychology, philosophy, religion, and personality of the persona, but also the significant things which the poet sees in contemporary society, both his own and that of the poem.

In another sense, Browning's dramatis personae are all psychologists in their own right, for each of the monologues is really an implied analytical dialogue with some other facet of the self, however important the "audience" in the poem might be in establishing point of view. One of the central subjects of Men and Women is love. That the treatment of it is psychological "case-work" is reiterated by C.H. Herford:

But of Browning's original 'fifty men and women,' nearly half were lovers or occupied with love No English poet of his century, and few of any other, have made love seem so wonderful; but he habitually takes this wonder bruised and jostled in the grip of thwarting conditions. In his way of approaching love Browning strangely blends the mystic's exaltation with the psychologist's cool penetrating scrutiny of its accompanying phenomena, its favourable or impending conditions.

The critics may be in agreement about Browning's psychological insight into his time, his "mystical" exaltation. But it will be our purpose to go behind these observations to discover how closely Browning does come in his poetry to the psychology of Freud or the mysticism of Boehme.

The illuminating level of interpretation of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the major poem in terms of our approach to imagery, will be drawn from a parallel with Norman O. Brown's Life Against Death, subtitled "The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History." Brown states that he is "concerned with reshaping psychoanalysis into a wider general theory of human nature, culture, and history, to be appropriated by the consciousness of mankind as a whole as a new stage in the historical process of man's coming to know himself."⁷ To justify using this re-evaluation of Freud in the study of a Victorian poet, one can look to Freud's own statement that "the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied."⁸ Also we shall be touching on Browning's understanding of what would be seen now as a Nietzschean philosophy; Brown in turn refers to the "unpremeditated affinity between Freud and Nietzsche."⁹

As further affirmation of this approach to literature, of the

merging of two disciplines, Brown summarizes for us Lionel Trilling's

The Liberal Imagination:

The discovery of psychoanalytical themes in art is put in proper perspective, as we academics say, by the doctrine that 'there is no single meaning to any work of art.' By means of this cliché the house that Freud built is absorbed into the stately mansion of traditional criticism. We are free to recognize a psychoanalytic theme in art, but we are not compelled to; and if we do recognize a psychoanalytic theme, we need not be disturbed because we are free to drown it in a rich orchestration of multiple meanings. Similarly the possibilities opened up by the analogues between artistic technique and the processes of the unconscious are put in proper perspective by the traditional tribute to 'the formal control of the conscious mind.' . . . The ego remains the master in the house of art.¹⁰

Although Brown is undeniably scornful of this compromise in even trying to keep the best of both worlds we can discover something exciting in each. And we shall see that Browning recognizes the saving grace of coming to know the unconscious, to "Know thyself."

William Whitla's theory in The Central Truth that it is the Incarnation which orders Browning's poetry is another slant on the same type of criticism, this time through the marriage of religion and art, with psychology and history joined in. Psychology is timeless, and so are certain psychological events in time. The Incarnation is one of the crises in history which transcends chronological time; it in turn gives meaning to the next crisis which Whitla sees as the Renaissance. The artists of the Renaissance had insight which was timeless, and Browning uses this insight for his own artistic creations. Similarly, what Browning portrays in his poetry is "modern" in the sense that everything having to do with the human mind and the unconscious has no historic limits, but is simply waiting to be discovered or reinterpreted. Thus

we can be free to relate Browning's psychology as we perceive it in his poetry to the psychological conceptions of our modern thinkers, such as classicist-historian Norman O. Brown, concerned with a psychoanalysis of civilization.

Now all the purpose of Browning's work and life has been to show people what a very wonderful and complex and incomprehensible thing human character is - therefore to show that the most needful of all study is the study of human character. He is especially the poet of character, the only one who has taught us, since Shakespeare's time, what real men and women are, how different each from every other, how unclassifiable according to any general rule, how differently novel at their best, how differently wicked at their worst, how altogether marvellous and infinitely interesting.¹¹ His mission has been the mission of a great dramatic psychologist.

These words from a lecture given by Lafacadio Hearn early in this century perhaps sound like a grand generalization. But they represent a typical evaluation of Browning by a dependable critic, and make a good contrast to our study, hopefully without benefit or hindrance of value judgements, of the poetry of Browning as a poet. It is time to see where a close appraisal of imagery will take us. Sufficient to say here that out of the examination of image will come insights into themes now only guessed at. We leave "this dancing ring of men and women"¹² as a body to study them individually as they are revealed by the particular imagery of the poem in which they live and have their being. The "ring" will dance in time and out of it, formlessly and with form, but as it returns to the point of beginning, soon to be revealed, it is hoped that there will be a "still point of the turning world" which will help us to perceive a unity on at least one level in the poems of Men and Women. Nor is it an accident that a line of Eliot appears, for in the quest to follow in the next chapters, we will be in a spiritual, cultural, and personal waste-

land, with affinities and also great differences to the world of the more "modern" poet, Eliot.

CHAPTER I

"THE VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FLESH"

To discuss Browning as an imagist, as a poet of words as much as of ideas, may seem misguided if the criticism of the past century is allowed to influence us in proportion to its weight, balanced heavily on the side of Browning as a philosopher and thinker, either extraordinarily brilliant with a message to give or a prophecy to make, or else as a poet masking a shallow view of life in obscure language and thought. To consider his poetry as poetry was until recent years unheard of, except to excuse Browning's weakness as a "real" poet by extolling his virtues as a thinker. Herford's book Robert Browning is a modified version of this type of criticism, although generally outweighed by the critic's acute facility for perceiving what is poetic in Browning.

'A poet never dreams,' said his philosophical Don Juan, 'we prose folk always do'; and the epigram brilliantly announced the character of Browning's poetic world, - the world of prose illuminated through and through in every cranny and crevice by the keenest and most adventurous of exploring intellects.¹

Not only nineteenth-century critics of Browning, but even some very recent ones such as Duffin and Kenmare have generally chosen to relate the man and his poetry to the extent of idealizing both for such unpoetical reasons as the moral or Christian virtues extolled therein. Those scholars who do go beyond this form of eulogizing will be referred to when they occasionally light on the particular study we wish to carry out here. William Whitla and Herford especially touch the periphery, and move well inside, of the approach to be taken, if they miss the central

issues at stake. And Park Honan's discussion of animal imagery in Browning's Characters certainly opens the door to various image categories, although he takes them at their most basic level of characterization, dealing individually with some poems, but not seeking a total reading arising out of psychological and literary allusions. One may also acknowledge the value of general studies of Browning's poetic canon as a whole, or of individual poems, in helping to give the most sound interpretations to date of the central monologues especially, and of the themes linking these poems. Such critics and scholars as DeVane, E.D.H. Johnson, Langbaum, Roma King, Jr., and essayists Santayana, Bonnell, Hearn and others, will at appropriate points be called upon to give insight into or opposition to new suggestions to be made in this study.

Where does one begin in dealing with such a diversified and nebulous factor as imagery, in such a wide volume of poetry? A single passage from a poem which is central to Browning's canon, a major dramatic monologue no matter what the criteria for judgement might be, will launch us from the general to the particular, and into the heart of Men and

Women:

For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints -
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world -
 ('Flower o' the peach,
 Death for us all, and his own life for each!')
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
 In pure rage! the old mill-horse, out at grass
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
 Although the miller does not preach to him
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.

What would men have? Do they like grass or no -
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled for ever one way. As it is,
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
 I always see the garden and God there
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

(IV, 111-12, 245-69)

This passage comes from "Fra Lippo Lippi" and contains images of major recurring categories to be examined. But it is also vitally relevant because it contains metaphors of all the major themes which it is hoped will eventually be linked implicitly to the imagery. In isolating particular word pictures from this passage, one notices immediately "the old mill horse," an image which carries through half of the quotation. The "grass" is also a central image, standing as it does for simple sensual pleasure. Then the monologue is interrupted by the street-song with its simple "Flower o' the peach." The culminating image comes in the final four lines, with "the Garden and God there / A-making man's wife." There are categorically three kinds of imagery contained in this portion of the poem, then; namely animal images, plant images, and images from the Bible. Of course, these three groups cannot be kept separate, although we will in the following chapter attempt an arbitrary division.

Immediately, a modification will have to be made concerning the third example, for in it we have overlapped the other two categories. The image is of a garden, which would be an expanded plant image. Then we find in the garden a man and a woman, both the highest forms of animals. It is appropriate too, when we think of the title of this volume, Men

and Women, that such an image should introduce us to Browning's perception of life. (Indeed, all these images are animate and portray life; in their multiplication throughout the poems in almost infinite variety they become an affirmation of Creation.) The garden image here is explicitly Eden. However, for Browning Eden is not always a formalized or a natural garden. It may be the alley's end in Florence, "Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar," or any place where beauty exists and life is lived. We will not be dealing with all the imagery of the Bible in Browning; rather the Garden of Eden is one landscape among many ranging from formal to states of wilderness.

There is a central image, Biblical and Christian in context, which recurs throughout Men and Women. This is the Incarnation, which as perceived by Browning transcends any creed or dogma and exists out of time and space, yet paradoxically within them. Although it is neither a theme nor an image in the passage quoted from "Fra Lippo Lippi," it is there by implication as subject matter for the painting which he imagines as his masterpiece. Also, in this poem the moment is a critical one in the persona's life, and the chronological time is the Renaissance which included the "infinite moment" of the Incarnation within it. More specifically, "the value and significance of flesh" is a paraphrase of the meaning of Incarnation, as in a broader way are all the images of plants and animals. All are living parts of a universe created by God; in the Incarnation His word also was made flesh. But the meaning of the Incarnation is more pervasive than this; its ramifications will be revealed in the process of this discussion.

The suggestion made to this point is that the examples of images from "Fra Lippo Lippi" constitute a microcosm of Browning's total image patterns, and also of his central themes; that they represent the form and the content, the medium and the message. And in a sense these will be the limits imposed on this thesis. But it is not to suggest that there are not other important kinds of imagery in the poems. We chose "Fra Lippo Lippi" for purposes of introduction; to deal with it more fully will only be possible when it is brought together with the rest of the poems in the 1855 volume.

If we consider the kinds of images within the three categories arbitrarily listed, the possibilities are almost unlimited. What are the areas of exploration which will be most valuable in leading us to the fullest implications of Browning's poetry? These will be recurring images contained in the allusions to plants, animals, and from the Bible. In the category of plant imagery, we will also consider the garden, a specific landscape. If, in investigating animal imagery, we consider the animal to be man, it will be relevant to look at images of the body. And also leading out of this will be images evoking particularly one or more of the senses. Both plant and animal imagery as it used by Browning is extremely sensual, and we are not citing sensual as a separate category. Of course, Browning's sensuality does raise a problem central to this thesis and it may be useful here to survey briefly the way in which critics have approached the subject.

Johnson, in The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, presents a

statement which brings us into the realm of the dichotomy (or inter-relationship) of spirit and flesh. But our concern now will be with the latter part of the following quotation:

His [Browning's] belief that the intuitions operate through the instrumentality of the emotions rather than the intellect led Browning to a frank celebration of man's physical nature, very foreign to Victorian reticence in such matters.²

The word "physical" has been, with the word "muscular," in frequent use to describe the nature of Browning's poetics. C. H. Herford specifies the sensuousness of Browning's perception:

The implicit realism of his eye and ear was fortified by acute tactual and muscular sensibilities. He makes us vividly aware of surface and texture, of space, solidity, shape. Matter for him is not the translucent, tenuous, half-spiritual substance of Shelley, but aggressively massive and opaque, tense with solidity.³

As J. K. Bonnell indicates clearly, Browning not only develops the senses of sight and hearing, but also the tactile sense:

The external world perceived by him is not solely a world of eye and ear, but a world of eye and ear - to say nothing of nose and tongue - also of tactual nerves, a world of palpable forms, of touch.⁴

Bonnell carries through the implications of Browning's tactile imagery by calling him "the poet par excellence of the third dimension - the architect, sculptor, poet to the finger-tips."⁵ If this is the case, continues Bonnell, it lays Browning even more open to charges of crudity, since images of touch are closer to the flesh with its inherent frailties. But our intention, surely, in stressing the tactile nature of the images is to show that Browning is a poet who extols the flesh and body, however much his outward theme may appear to be concerned with the workings of man's soul.⁶ (Actually we will see that he would not wish such separation

between body and soul to exist.) Santayana was to attack Browning as a poet of barbarism because of his muscular diction, because he did not transcend the flesh and the experience of the moment, because he did not bring his passionate ideas within the bounds of form. Sensuousness and coarseness are by no means synonymous, however, while the question of form will have to be evaded for the present, the problem being largely a matter of definition of terms.

Herford also distinguishes Browning's method of evoking the senses from that of the symbolist poet:

He had not the brooding eye, beneath which, as it gazes, loveliness becomes far lovelier, but an organ aggressively alert, minutely inquisitive, circumstantially exact, which perceived the bearings of things, and explored their intricacies, noted how the mortar was tempered in the walls and if any struck a woman or beat a horse, but was as little prone to transfigure these or other things with the glamour of mysterious suggestion as the eye of Peter Bell himself.

These characteristics of Browning the poet are abstracted from "How It Strikes A Contemporary" and are also the qualities of craftsmanship with which we would invest "Fra Lippo Lippi." It is not safe to identify any poet too closely with his persona. However, there are still some apt observations to consider. Although Herford goes on to describe Browning as a realist whose senses serve an "active brain," but do not transform mysteriously what they take up, we can stop with the passage just quoted, and focus on the word "perceived." Browning perceived the world around him in minute detail rather than conceiving a new world in which to dwell poetically. That is, he apprehended the world through his senses and the mind, but did not formulate and create it in his imagination or fancy. His conception came rather in his poetic form, in the medium,

never divided of course from the matter with which his observation and intuition provided him. One may substantiate this emphasis on perception by looking at a section from "Saul," as David is soliloquizing on Creation and its astounding implications:

"Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me.
 Each faculty tasked
 "To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where
 a dewdrop was asked.
 "Have I knowledge? confounded it strives at
 Wisdom laid bare.
 "Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank,
 to the Infinite Care!
 "Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
 "I but open my eyes, - and perfection, no more
 and no less,
 "In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God
 is seen God
 "In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the
 soul and the clod. (III, 193-94, 243-50)

The focus comes to rest always on the object itself, be it animate or inanimate, and for a particular purpose. "Saul" is a poem which employs a more naturalistic use of sensual imagery than some, but even here we see "soul" and "flesh" are mentioned in the same breath as "star", which is followed, in the "chain of being" at least, by "stone" and "clod."

If we are discussing the images which are of the body, one of the subdivisions of animal imagery mentioned above, we are necessarily going to lead into Browning's use of imagery which is implicitly or explicitly sexual. Browning was conscious of the implications carried by much of his imagery; again, it is his focussing on the particular aspect of a plant, animal or landscape which leads us to this assumption. (Here it should be noted that images of body may just as easily derive from plant allusions as from animal.) We have already had E. D. H. Johnson's

statement that Browning's intuitions operate through emotion rather than intellect, a problematical claim which leads to such charges as the one Santayana makes in "The Poetry of Barbarism." The "physical" in Browning's poetry is not to be denied. But we intend to show that the conscious theme of the good moment, and the stress on the importance of life and of the body, is borne out by the sexual and fleshly nature of much of the imagery. Some of the imagery will be deliberately and clearly linked with human physiology, while other images will have sexual connotations which can be substantiated by what Freud has made part of our tradition.

Langbaum, in The Poetry of Experience, makes the following distinction:

. . . it is generally true that extraordinary motives in Browning come not from disordered subconscious urges but, as in Henry James, from the highest moral and intellectual refinement.

This is being applied to poetic creation, which is our concern, and not to the artist's personality as such. It is the work in process of being created, the "living" thing, which we would most like to capture. With this in mind, I would say that the poet is quite likely giving voice to "subconscious urges" whether or not they need to be termed "disordered," which are controlled by the form of his work. To say that Browning was highly conscious of the explicit connotations which his imagery could have, is not to eliminate the unconscious elements in his poetry. Perhaps it would be most in order to say here that Browning was conscious of the existence of the unconscious, and that occasionally in his creative life he let it have its play, while at other times there is an unconscious

level to his work which underplays and counterpoints the conscious level.

The purpose of this digression is to introduce one of the most important image patterns which recurs in central poems throughout Men and Women, that of landscape as the unconscious, or the mind as a landscape, composed of both plant and animal forms.⁹ This category will necessarily overlap the other patterns to be discussed. And within it we will see human beings treated as objects, objects or landscape humanized, and sexual imagery in the landscapes. Also, sexual imagery in plants and animals, for example, or the animation of inanimate objects, reveals the unconscious of the speaker or persona. It will be seen that archetypal or universal symbols occur in such a poem as "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," but that more often it is the particular use of a specific image in the context of the poem, and recurring in other poems, which will reveal the unconscious, and show poetically its existence. To isolate sexual images and enumerate them is insufficient in itself, unless the state of mind of the persona is also revealed to some degree. If an overall predominant pattern can be discovered in Men and Women, only then may we suggest the state of mind of the creator and the direction in which his intuitions have led him.

Although our primary concern is with a discussion of imagery, there are some constant themes which will inevitably recur in our study, whether or not they are revealed directly by the image patterns we discover. Our purpose here is to limit the themes to be singled out to those which most immediately arise out of the imagery at hand. Other major themes which

are commonly considered in Browning scholarship can only be alluded to, or at most, suggestions may be made which would link them to the themes already seen as central. There are two interrelated themes to which we will refer frequently in the scope of the investigation. These are the themes of Incarnation and time. Obviously these are so broad as to require extensive study, if they are to be done justice. Therefore I intend to limit coverage of them in direct accordance with specific problems and elements arising from the chapters on imagery. Now a general discussion is appropriate for the two themes, much as we allotted to the general image categories earlier in this chapter, and then we will narrow down to the relation themes will bear to image. Reference will also be made in part to scholarship which evolves around these two themes.

The Incarnation, as the center, beginning and end of Christianity, is the subject of William Whitla's book, The Central Truth, in which he makes the Incarnation the unifying element in Browning's major poems, including many we will refer to from Men and Women. One can see the Christian Incarnation as the archetype of all other revelations, and as being all incarnations in one. Whitla does deal with it in religious, psychological, aesthetic, and symbolic terms, (with always its Christian implications as his pivotal point.) But he defines the Incarnation to underplay, paradoxically, the role of the flesh and senses. He sees fleshly love by itself as profane and imperfect, affirming that love ordered by the implications of the Incarnation is timeless and perfect, beyond the physical. However, from our perspective if the Incarnation involves, and means literally, the embodiment in flesh, to give the body

less than major importance is a contradiction, yet Whitla does just that.¹⁰ His consideration of the Incarnation as central to understanding Browning's poetry is invaluable, both for its thorough treatment of this complex subject, and for the intense light ~~it~~ throws on individual poems. But one is left feeling that there is too much that is abstract, that the Incarnation has a real and particular place in Browning's creativity which has not been discovered. Imagery will provide the key.

This thesis has not room in its scope to discuss completely the Incarnation; where Whitla's analysis of various poems which deal with it, and with the two other crises in civilization, the Renaissance in art and the Nineteenth Century in love aids us, we shall draw upon him. Rather than dwelling further on Whitla's omissions, it is sufficient to say here that the theme arising directly from animal and plant imagery in affinity with the Incarnation is the role of body in Browning's poetry, as opposed to, or as, the soul. That our interpretation of Incarnation varies from Whitla's will be made clear in Chapter III which deals fully with "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," making it the center of Browning's "ring" of men and women. For it will be seen to throw shafts of light on all the poems to be discussed in Chapter II, and is linked to them through its imagery. Yet in Whitla's elaborate scheme of charting all of Browning's major monologues, dramatic lyrics, and love lyrics, according to the degree in which they succeed in attaining the "infinite moment" in terms of the Incarnation, there is no place for "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." It is the odd poem out, as far as his arrangement of the poems is concerned.¹¹ Yet the affirmation in this thesis is that

not only is "Childe Roland" the central poem of Men and Women, perhaps of all the poetry, but that also, in spite of the unfamiliarity of its subject matter, it implicitly contains in its imagery and meaning the elements of the monologues on religion, art and love.

The theme of time is inextricably linked with that of Incarnation. The Incarnation is the moment (kairos) which crosses linear time (chronos). According to Whitla, "Time, the Incarnation, and the poetic experience become ordered in the aesthetic pattern of a poem so that the poet's own personal emotions are ordered."¹² Time is not only a theme in Browning's poems then, but it provides the form; in its order the poet's own emotions are ordered. Thus the form of the dramatic monologue, first developed by Browning, is really an incarnational experience, the word made flesh. Paradoxically it is timeless, yet in time, presenting a crisis point in the whole life of the speaker, which is yet only a repetition of other discontinuous moments in his life:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present¹³
All time is unredeemable.

Geoffrey H. Hartman, in an essay on Hopkins which deals incidentally with Browning, relates the moment to the artistic form in the following way:

Whether or not the religious cause is fundamental, each poet introduces a new density of diction and structure into the lyric. Browning does it primarily by the dramatic method, by speaking through characters caught in a moment which is the equivalent of the fruitful or characteristic moment prescribed for the visual arts.¹⁴

This "fruitful" moment will have an ultimate meaning when we have dealt extensively with the imagery.

Langbaum speaks of the persona bursting into song, out of all proportion to the event which actually triggered the monologue:

Yet it is just the gratuitous nature of their utterance that constitutes the speakers' 'Song,' for the speakers of dramatic monologues burst into utterance in the same sense that the verb is used in connection with song. Just as in the opera the singer only wants occasion to burst into an aria . . . so in the dramatic monologue the dramatic situation is less the adequate motive than the occasion for a total outpouring of soul, the expression of the speaker's whole life until that moment.¹⁵

Brockington, too, speaks of the man telling his own tale or singing his own song. But after the moment which has precipitated the pouring forth of the speaker's heart and soul, this present moment, everything before and after it will assume different perspective, if the moment has become the "infinite moment." This is where the imagery of the lyrics, the soliloquies and the dramatic monologues will provide a unity of theme. Where life can rise above death-in-life, the moment will be infinite, whether the experience has been in religion, art, music or love. It is time then to discover the "value and significance" of all the facets of plant and animal imagery, and relevant aspects of Biblical imagery, in Men and Women.

CHAPTER II

THE WEB THE SPIDER WEAVES

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalised me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

"Two in the Campagna," (III, 218)

The spider's web as a metaphor for the poetic "thought" process and the "thought" of the lover is an image of the imagery which is in the "rhymes," catching at some elusive theme which we never quite manage to hold fast. In the attempt to do so, however, we are going to begin the discussion of animal and plant imagery. The singling out of images, according to rather open categories, and from poems seemingly chosen at random, may be interesting, but quite without direction. However, as images recur, validating to some extent our choice to concentrate on this area of the poetic process, an order and purpose will begin to suggest itself. From general examples, we will necessarily find ourselves moving to a deeper discussion of the meaning of each particular image, with its literary allusion and psychological implications. Possible alliances with the imagery of dreams and the unconscious, seen through mental processes, will form of themselves. The stress on the senses in Browning's poetry will be given special consideration, after examples have already shown us the sensual nature of the imagery. At this point too, we shall concentrate briefly on the images which are drawn from the body, to show the emphasis on the thing itself, on the particular and the concrete in

the poet's perception, whether it be of man, animals or plants.

A natural category arising from general mention of the variety and scope of plant imagery, and the specific appearance of the rose in Men and Women, will be the garden. The one we will concentrate on will be Eden, as seen in the passage from "Fra Lippo Lippi," although other garden images will be evident. The garden is also only one kind of landscape, and it is in Chapter III that we wish to study in detail landscape as the unconscious. It will become increasingly evident, as the investigation proceeds, that Browning's images are always used in a particular way for their individual effectiveness. Also, the quotations from various poems will have illustrated that no category is inclusive, that plant and animal images exist together and are frequently the details in a broader background or landscape.

In discussing those images which are consciously or unconsciously sexual, either by implication or association, or by their very animal nature, the relation of image to the state of mind of the persona will assume greater importance. By this stage, even if theme is not explicitly dealt with, the relationship of those aspects of the themes of Incarnation and time which were referred to in the previous chapter will be emerging in clearer light. The final concentrated study of "By the Fire-Side" and "Two In the Campagna," major love poems in Browning's canon, will lead naturally to the illuminating heart of Men and Women, and of this thesis. This will be in the multi-level reading of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the subject of Chapter III. It will then be

realized that the categories of imagery previously exemplified are all related to a lesser or greater extent to this central poem. When the culminating point is reached, the total meaning of this poem will have shed rays of light on the fifty poems constituting Men and Women. Rather than define our goals any more clearly at this stage, it is time to examine the various categories which we have previewed above, to try and catch at the web.

Animal images occur well over one hundred and fifty times in Men and Women. In very few cases are the images used only in a naturalistic way, or are they to be taken completely literally, unless their purpose is cumulatively to build a sensual mood, as in certain parts of "Saul." More often the images, although they are certainly word pictures evoking the senses, have dramatic or symbolic overtones in their particular context, and perhaps also contain an archetypal point of reference. Their meaning emerges not in mere suggestiveness, but in a most particular and "concrete" exactness.

The infinite variety of the animal kingdom is used to such advantage by Browning that one could say, in this facet of his poetry alone, that he was affirming Creation. We shall concentrate, in our general exemplification of animal imagery, on the insect world. But there are allusions to many species of birds, to serpents, fish, frogs, scorpions, mice and rats, goats, stags, leopards, lynx, apes, cats, rabbits, dogs, horses, and even to the dragon and the equally fabulous chimaera. To give examples of this bestiary at length would serve no particular

purpose; it is sufficient to say that they will be well-represented in the illustrations of the various sub-categories of animal imagery. There is an equally wide and abundant representation of the variety in the plant kingdom, ranging from the mushroom to the yew tree. It is not only their appearance in the poems which is significant, but the particular way in which each one contributes to form and meaning.

In terms of their frequency alone, images involving insect life achieve a surprising importance in Men and Women. The predominating creatures (and here the term "insect" is used in a broad and not strictly entomological sense) are the worm, the fly, and the spider, but in significant usage the bee and wasp are major contributors also. Insects are used as simple metaphors of character types in some poems. For instance, the "butterflies" who may dread extinction in "A Toccata of Galuppi's" are the earthly lovers, the women fickle and gay, who once listened to music in bygone Venice. (A parallel could perhaps be drawn with the butterfly image at the end of King Lear.) Similarly, the flies in this couplet from "A Light Woman" are the speaker's metaphor for the parasites clinging around the "ripe" woman whom he "picks" like a pear:

'T was quenching a dozen blue-flies thirst
When I gave its stalk a twist.

(III, 330)

Even when the insect is named as part of a descriptive passage, it has significance because of the dramatic nature of all the poems. And more often it can be seen as an image of the unconscious, as in one of

the dramatic lyrics, "A Lover's Quarrel," where the insect imagery builds up the mood of the poem and reveals something of the state of mind of the persona:

XVI

What of a hasty word?
 Is the fleshly heart not stirred
 By a worm's pin-prick
 Where its roots are quick?
 See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred -
 Ear, when a straw is heard
 Scratch the brain's coat of curd! (III, 153, 106-112)

The images in this passage are as tactile and auditory, through their physical nature and consonantal sounds, as they are visual. In an essay which compares Browning with Hopkins, J. Hillis Miller refers to this quality in Browning's language, which is important in our overall concentration on the physical in Browning's imagery:

Browning, too, likes words which, as they are pronounced, give a kinesthetic possession of the thing named. But Browning is most interested in the rough, solid weight of matter which all things share; consequently his onomatopoeic words are thick with harsh consonants expressing the universal density of material substance.

More will be said about "inscape" and "individuation" in Browning as obvious parallels arise. But to return to the passage from "Lover's Quarrel," clearly the insects here are more than themselves; in spite of their size they have a magnified effect on the senses. Thus they are a metaphor for the "hasty word" which has results out of all proportion to its moment in time. But there is no generalization; the deliberate choice of images and words creates the strange sense effect.

In the following stanza from "Up At A Villa - Down In the City,"

the insect imagery contributes to the sense of dryness and sterility which the speaker attributes to the villa setting.² In fact, what the description reveals is his own sterility in choosing the city, with its death, stagnation and corruption, over the life of the senses which is existent here:

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see
 though you linger,
 Except yon cypress that points like death's lean
 lifted forefinger.
 Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the
 corn and mingle,
 Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem
 a-tingle.
 Late August or early September, the stunning
 cicada is shrill,
 And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the
 resinous firs on the hill. (III, 157)

In "A Serenade at the Villa" on the other hand, it is the absence of insect sounds and sights which conveys the sense of stillness and withholding, and the frustration the would-be lover is feeling:

Not a twinkle from the fly,
 Not a glimmer from the worm;
 When the crickets stopped their cry,
 When the owls forebore a term,
 You heard music; that was I. (III, 222)

When these insects are present with the "Light" at the end of "Choruses from 'The Rock,'" one can juxtapose the significance of their absence, and the absence of any form of light in Browning's poem:

Moon light and star light, owl and moth light,
 Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade,
 O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!³

We began this chapter with a quotation which used the metaphor of

the spider's web. Among the insect images found in Men and Women, the spider does seem to assume a prominent place, because of the manner in which it is used. In "Mesmerism" the spider image has human, even demonic connotations:

IV

And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
Comes to find, God knows what friends! (III, 280, 16-20)

The spider is used dramatically in "Another Way of Love": the woman would rid herself of those "insects," men, just as she would prevent spiders from spinning. In "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" the spider's web becomes an image for the web the complex fugue weaves; just as somewhere behind the real web is the gilded roof of the church, so behind the intricacies of the fugue which "broaden and thicken," there must be the music, the meaning of it all. Or is it all hollow illusion?⁴ In one of the medical cures which Karshish begins to relate in his "Epistle," to hide what is really important to him, he writes:

... there's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;
Take five and drop them.... (IV, 90, 45-48)

One wonders what significance this watcher of tombs might have. Is not Lazarus' thread with the surface reality of this world now broken, after he has returned from the tomb? In Eliot's "Gerontion" the narrator is in his old age, but he has not "seen" as has Lazarus. He asks, after saying that he has lost all his senses:

What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
delay?

Thus, only in concentrating on one class in the animal world, one can see that there are allusions enough to prove Browning's minutely observing eye and his psychological understanding of what is appropriate to the persona at that particular moment. Other animals will emerge in their own right under the more specific areas of discussion. The sensual nature of the imagery, that is, its particular appeal to all of the five senses as mentioned in Chapter I, will be evident by now. But we will interject into the discussion some explicit examples of sense and body imagery. One of the most recurring images which is outside the scope of this thesis is gold, which has multiple literary and symbolic levels of meaning. But in Browning's poems, many of the gold allusions occur in conjunction with women's hair, a body image. The "gold hair" which is living is often juxtaposed with the gold which is only material, such as that which built past civilizations. We have already noted the allusion to gold as the pure refined product of the artistic process.

In "Love Among the Ruins" there is a juxtaposition of the girl and the civilization which is ironic in its implications. For "a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair" awaits the speaker in the turret which once looked on the rich city:

And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force -
Gold, of course. (III, 148)

The irony is that although their love may be more transcendent than riches

of civilization, it too is transient. But it is truly alive for the moment. In "Andrea del Sarto" Lucrezia's "hair's gold" tempted Andrea to use the French king's gold for her, but in both senses the gold did not cause him to really live, and he lost both artistic glory and love. The "gold" becomes interfused with his consciousness as he now reminisces without profound regrets:

God is just.
 King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick
 Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
 The gold of his I did cement them with!
 Let us but love each other.... (IV, 123, 213-19)

In "A Lover's Quarrel" there is a clever contrast between the Emperor's bride whom the lovers read about in the "Times," who "powders her hair with gold" (III, 150, 35), and the Pampas which they imagine as "Miles and miles of gold and green" (III, 150, 37). Young Evelyn Hope who died before her "good moment" could be reached, had hair of a "young gold," as did the beautiful women of Venice to whom Galuppi played his music in another century. The speaker is in sympathy with man's mortality, as he asks now:

Dear dead women, with such hair, too - what's
 become of all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel
 chilly and grown old. (III, 163)

The woman conjured up by the persona in "Mesmerism" has "hair-plait's chestnut gold," which becomes alive in this image:⁶

XXII
 Ha! was the hair so first?
 What, unfilleted,
 Made alive, and spread
 Through the void with a rich outburst,
 Chestnut gold-interspersed? (III, 284, 106-10)

Throughout "Mesmerism" there exists the "pathetic fallacy," the animation of inanimate objects, as the house has a life of its own. Perhaps a final image using gold in reference to hair could be cited in the description of David's "gracious gold hair" from "Saul." In Dramatis Personae, however, Browning's next volume of poetry, there is a poem relating hair and gold explicitly in both imagery and theme, called "Gold Hair: A Story of Pornic," and dealing with the ambiguous connection between beauty and human values.

There are many more gold images in Men and Women, but they would take us beyond the scope of animal imagery. After introducing hair imagery, we might look at further examples, as in "The Statue and the Bust." The lady is described in terms of particular animals and plants in images which seem to forewarn us of her destiny:

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure--
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure -
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure. (III, 393, 19-24)

In her youth she has the potential for passionate, intense living, but she foregoes it, watching "her youth / Depart, and the silver thread that streaked / Her hair, and worn, by the serpent's tooth, / The brow so puckered . . ." (III, 398-99, 157-60). Ironically, she must finally decide to have her beauty made immortal in a plaster bust by Robbia, for she asks:

"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
"The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
"And the blood that blues the inside arm -

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
 "The earthly gift to an end divine?
 "A lady of clay is as good, I trow." (III, 399, 181-86)

This is one illustration of Browning's recurring concern with the relation between life and art, and between living art and dead art. Even without the dogmatic statement which so fervently ends this poem, one can read his position in the images themselves. Finally, such an image as "fawn-skin-dappled hair" from "A Pretty Woman" seems to exemplify fairly clearly the Hopkinesque concepts of selving and individuation, both in sound and sense, showing the image with a life of its own.

In Chapter I Browning's tactile sensibilities were touched upon; here it is appropriate to look more closely at particular tactile images and their effect. Tactile pertains to the body, and is directly associated with the hand, although not limited to this one manifestation.⁷ However, Browning's use of "hand" imagery is commented on frequently by critics. For example, Bonnell, in his article mentioned above, writes,

The world of imagination which he creates is strikingly vivid and real; in it we have a sense of solidity and atmosphere that envelopes, an earth beneath the feet, hands that meet and clasp our own.

What he is saying becomes evident when we look at any of the images, for they derive their effect from the feeling that they are learned and made concrete by touch, as much as by sight. There is the stanza from "Love Among the Ruins" which vividly adds the element of physical contact to the visualization of the lovers' meeting:

On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face,
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each. (III, 148)

In "A Lover's Quarrel" the man gives advice on the trick of waiting for some sign that they are mediums for a spirit, in one of their "games":

Try, will our table turn?
 Lay your hand there light, and yearn
 Till the yearning slips
 'Thro the finger-tips
 In a fire which a few discern,
 And a very few feel burn,
 And the rest, they may live and learn!
 (III, 150, 43-48)

There are many other "hand" allusions in this poem. All of the love lyrics can be seen to evoke the sense of touch. For instance, "A Woman's Last Word" has this request:

Be a god and hold me
 With a charm!
 Be a man and fold me
 With thine arm! (III, 142)

And later the woman agrees to please her husband and salvage their love; to meet his demands and lay both "flesh and spirit" in his hands.

The dramatic monologues themselves have recurring "hand" images which in some cases do form a pattern. One could recount many instances when hands affect Fra Lippo Lippi, from the moment he is seized by the neck by one of the guards at the dramatic opening. In his boyhood, "Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed [him] with one hand" (IV, 106,88), he escaped his prison in the mews by scrambling down a rope, hand over hand, and finally the "soft hand" of the prior's niece will draw him into place within the framework of his masterpiece. Lippo, so much in touch with life,

continually seeks physical contact, as when he sits by the captain of the guard, "hip to haunch." In "Andrea del Sarto," by contrast, the hand is used in protective, encompassing images, symbolic of Andrea's desire to shut himself away from the real world. The hand he refers to is that of Lucrezia. He shuts into her "small hand" the money from his painting, so that she will sit quietly as he asks her "with your hand in mine." And one of the most revealing, if strange, images is this one in which the part comes to represent the whole:

Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside. (IV, 117, 21-22)

It substantiates the serpent image referred to in connection with Lucrezia elsewhere in the poem. Hands are essential to the painter, but Andrea in his failure speaks of "This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine" (IV, 119, 82). And the climactic tactile image in this poem is "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?" (IV, 120, 97-98) Finally, combining the two patterning images of gold and hand, we have Andrea's ironic plea:

Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine! (IV, 122, 175-76)

In "Old Pictures in Florence" we are introduced to a more subtle evocation of the tactile sense, in a series of "sculptured lines" discussing the Renaissance masters:

My business was hardly with them, I trow,
But with empty cells of the human hive;
.....
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
Its face set full for the sun to shave.

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
 Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
 Till the latest life in the painting stops,
 Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains:
 One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
 Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
 -A Lion who dies of an ass's kick,
 The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.
 (III, 165, 35-48)

Here we see Browning making us aware of "surface and texture" and "a world of palpable forms, or touch" as he explores the "intricacies" of things like a sculptor.

There are of course many other images of the body apart from the hand, and specifically, the word "flesh" recurs in many contexts. Lippo fervently believes that it is "flesh and blood" which the artist must paint. And Karshish blushes to confess "What set me off a-writing first of all / An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!" (IV, 91, 66-67) As a doctor it is not surprising that he makes many allusions to flesh, such as "man's flesh" and "As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!" (IV, 92, 106) for he is a most practical and realistic person. In "Mesmerism" the woman whom the speaker calls forth is not simply spirit, but body as well; and she must "bring flesh and all, / Essence and earth-attire, / To the source of the tactile fire-" (III, 283, 73-75) as he commands her. The would-be lovers in "The Statue and the Bust" become images of themselves, as alive in art as they ever were in the flesh, where they were afraid to act, waiting for expedience to make the decision for them:

'What matters it at the end?

"I did no more while my heart was warm

"Than does the image, my pale-faced friend.'

(III, 399, 178-180)

Flesh is transient, art is permanent, and one does not equal the other.

In "The Last Ride Together" the image of the never-ending ride of the two lovers on horseback, in truth an illusion, suggests the fleshly limitations of joy, the one moment which is impossible to hold. The man imagines he can keep his mistress while flesh fades, in a heaven-on-earth, but the irony is that he is setting up a physical permanence of the moment which as he is speaking will have passed. For it is their 'last ride' and he has already asked the significant question, "What will but felt the fleshly screen?" (III, 334, 59) The reconciliation of body and soul is a recurring problem for Browning's personae, one which few of them solve.

If we move forward to Browning's plant imagery in Men and Women, we find no flower with more symbolic significance than the rose. Northrop Frye, in discussing Eliot's poetry, cites numerous levels at which the rose has meaning. It is the flower of the West and is often found in a garden, signifying Eden; it implies innocence, religious heaven, the past, the Tree of Life, forgetfulness, memory, immortality in time, with the paradox of transience. Browning by no means uses the rose in a consistent symbolic way, nor as part of a system. But one may sense some of the literary and religious meanings which add depth in the context of the poem. The rose of course may be "merely" a rose.

There are several poems which do use the rose as an organizing image for the idea which is being suggested, be it about art, religion or love. The theme of "A Pretty Woman" is the relationship between art, beauty and the transience of life and love:

XVI

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose, -
 Plucks a mould-flower
 For his gold flower,
 Uses fine things that efface the rose:

XVII

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,
 Precious metals
 Ape the petals, -
 Last, some old king locks it up, morose!

XVIII

Then how grace a rose? I know a way!
 Leave it, rather.
 Must you gather?
 Smell, kiss, wear it - at last, throw away! (III, 230-31)

Better far to appreciate a rose, or a woman, in their natural imperfection, than to transform them by art to possessions which are locked away. The pretty woman who will not let her beauty be held and loved is merely an ornament to look at. This is again the message of "The Statue and the Bust." But in "A Pretty Woman" the suggestion is that the completion of love from a man who would make her in his own image would destroy the imperfection, the graceful innocence. Perhaps her beauty should be left growing like a rose; "My Last Duchess" would seem to bear out this interpretation.

The concept of seizing the good moment which is conveyed in the last stanza recurs in various forms, using flower images, throughout

Men and Women. Before her death, Evelyn Hope had "plucked that piece of geranium-flower, / Beginning to die too, in the glass" (III, 143, 4-5). There is an allusion to holding on to the good moment as long as possible, in "Any Wife to Any Husband":

. . . Pass a festive day
Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.
(III, 213, 34-36)

(This seemingly contradicts the verses quoted from "A Pretty Woman" but one must consider the whole context, and the point of view of the persona involved.) There is a rose simile in this poem presenting the fear of the wife that her husband would "steal" new pleasures if she were gone:

"And if a man would press his lips to lips
Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?"
(III, 215, 70-72)

She is putting these thoughts into his mind, as it were. The sensual imagery which we see here will be considered in detail as we proceed.

The companion pieces "One Way of Love" and "Another Way of Love" have the themes of unrequited love, and love's fickleness or boredom. The persona in the first poem, who is a man, tells us he has strewn Pauline's path with roses, but they do not "take her eye." The speaker in "Another Way of Love" is a woman, symbolized as June, the month when "the best of her roses / Had yet to blow" (III, 226). She sees, or imagines, her husband's boredom with her, and decides that she may quite rightly "mind her bower now, your hand left unsightly / By plucking the roses" (III, 226), in order to be ready for the new person who will appreciate her,

"One indulgent / To redness and sweetness" (III, 227) as she blossoms. The most significant representation of the "good moment" is in "Two In the Campagna" which will be fully analyzed at the conclusion of this chapter. The epitome of man's finiteness and the barrier between anticipation and realization would seem to be in these lines:

- I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak -
Then the good minute goes. (III, 220)

The poem "Women and Roses" conveys past, present, and future for the rose, and for the women who circle the persona's rose tree. The fading rose corresponds to the women who are preserved in art, and who exist in memory; the blooming rose is like the women who are alive now, and whom the speaker would know by experience; the bud is all the beautiful women to be born, and who can only be imagined now. When it is noted that this poem is partly based on a dream Browning had, its rose-garden setting suggests parallels with Frye's discussion ~~of~~ Four Quartets and other poems of Eliot.⁹ We shall not attempt to make Browning's rose so archetypal, but it is more symbolic in this dream-poem than in many of its other manifestations, with some of the tone of Villon's refrain, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

I dream of a wild rose tree.
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me? (III, 240)

There follow in alternating pattern three verses to present the stages of the rose's development, all simultaneously present on the one tree: "loose and bleached," next with the "cup's heart nectar-brimmed" with

joy "undimmed" and finally, to end with the beginning, "Dear rose without a thorn, / Thy bud's the babe unborn" (III, 240-41). Each group of women floats above and encircles its own particular rose. The speaker cannot prevent their circling, nor can he climb up to capture, freeze, possess and love the fading ones, nor physically embrace the blooming ones, nor create a "new" beauty in the roses to come. This, like "Childe Roland," is a central poem in reaching an understanding of Browning's imagery, and reference to it will be made further on.

The most grotesque rose metaphor occurs in "The Heretic's Tragedy," where the heretic as he is burned, becomes by analogy a huge flaming rose which slowly unfolds as his heart:

IX

Ha, ha, John plucks now at his rose
 To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
 Lo, - petal on petal, fierce rays uncloze;
 Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
 And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
 And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
 And lo, he is horribly in the toils
 Of a coal-black giant flower of hell! (III, 383)

As well as noting that this rose has a terribly masculine force, in contrast to the more feminine roses of other poems, we should perceive the alchemical connotations of the description.¹⁰ In the gloating, cynical eye of the persona who sends the heretic to his fate, figuratively speaking, the fire of John's martyrdom does not appear to be the fire of redemption out of agony, nor of divine love, as it is in Four Quartets. There is perhaps some connection with the tree of life, which for Dante is the rose, and in which, for Eliot, "the fire and the

rose are one."¹¹

In the preceding lengthy discussion of rose imagery in Four Quartets, we have already penetrated the garden as an image. It is true that most of the particular plant and animal images appear against an appropriate landscape or setting for the poem. The garden is one we shall observe at this time, but it will merge into the desert, when we concentrate on "Childe Roland." Symbolically, the desert and the garden are two sides of one coin, in literary and religious tradition. The garden is founded on the desert, while the desert may blossom in a more real way than the dream-like rose-garden.

Our first reference to a garden was in the initial passage quoted from "Fra Lippo Lippi" in Chapter I. In that poem it is the garden of Eden at the moment when experience is about to displace initial innocence, for the "value and significance of flesh" is central to Fra Lippo's concept of life and art. The garden will also be seen as a relevant image in the civilization-barbarism controversy which arises in criticism of Browning's poetry, and as an internal theme of this poetry. However, Eden appears by implication, even when the actual garden is not present, through other connotative images and symbols such as those in "A Woman's Last Word." Here the woman feels that her husband's strong arguments, however they may contain the literal truth, will destroy their love, just as the forbidden fruit of knowledge ended the state of innocence for the archetypal husband and wife:

Where the serpent's tooth is,
Shun the tree -

V
 Where the apple reddens
 Never pry -
 Lest we lose our Edens,
 Eve and I! (III, 141)

This would seem to posit an innocence of ignorance, rather than innocence evolving from experience, and it is a state of mind given to other lovers in Men and Women who wish to remain excluded from the reality of life. Here, although the wife agrees to subdue her own thoughts and to speak only the man's for the sake of love, it is ironic that she indeed has the "last word."

In "Andrea del Sarto" there are also important allusions to Eden. Lucrezia is both a Virgin, as she models for Andrea, and an Eve who has tempted him to compromise his art.¹² "My serpentining beauty, round on rounds!" (IV, 117, 26) he calls her. Her voice tempts him as if he were a bird, and he is lured to her snare. The ambiguity in these images is important in revealing the ambiguities and flaws in Andrea's character. His own desire is to curl up, as it were, in his Eden; and if it becomes a hell, this is easier to bear than facing the sun outside. We have already referred to "Women and Roses" with its garden. The speaker describes the "rose" he will grow: "I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her, / Shaped her to his mind!" (III, 241) Yet he cannot control this state of innocence; it is transient and creation is an instant in time, while paradoxically out of time.

For Browning, Eden is not necessarily a garden. The state of innocence with an accompanying joy in life may exist in a city like

Florence, and Eve may be a woman of the streets. (Although this is of course Lippo's point of view, and should not be equated with Browning's.)¹³ Nor need a garden indicate a paradisal state. For in "A Serenade At A Villa" the garden takes on the qualities of the woman who refuses the persona, and at the same time is expressive of his frustration, which is projected onto it:

Oh, how dark your villa was,
 Windows fast and obdurate!
 How the garden grudged me grass
 Where I stood - the iron gate
 Ground its teeth to let me pass! (III, 224)

Also, we see an example of the humanization or animalization of inanimate objects. In our discussion of "Childe Roland," landscape as a projection of the unconscious will be of primary importance. We should perhaps end this section with a reference to "Saul," a poem with many landscapes in it, and with overtones of the Psalms, reading in part like a celebration of all creation, both natural and cultivated. Saul, in his passive agony, is described as a "king-serpent," hanging on his tent-pole in a position of crucifixion, awaiting his deliverance in the spring.¹⁴ By the end of the poem when David foresees the Incarnation with all its implications, the serpent slides "away silent," having felt the "new law."

The categories we are choosing to exemplify are arbitrary, and no one kind of image is exclusive, as we have already noted. Thus, as we move specifically to a discussion of the sexual nature of the imagery, we will necessarily be looking at plant, animal and landscape patterns. This particular focus and perspective, however, will bring us closer

to the psychological, unconscious overtones of the imagery, to culminate in the next chapter. Sexual images are images of the body, or which connote the body, the word made flesh, in terms of our central theme of Incarnation. However, the implications will be allowed to evolve of themselves for the moment, through multiple examples, rather than by explicit logical argument. The embodiment in flesh is both a psychological and a creative process, and is another facet of Browning's concrete, particular use of images, diction and rhythm.

C. H. Herford comments in Robert Browning on the masculine and feminine symbols which recur in the poetry; the frequent reference to cups, clefts and hollows, and to sharp angularity and spikes. Of these symbols one could cite numerous general examples, but we shall limit ourselves to those which are founded directly on plant and animal images, or which take their place against a particular landscape. We have already quoted the passage from "Up At a Villa - Down In the City" which contains the phallic symbol of a "cypress that points like Death's lean lifted fore-finger" (III, 157), and in the word "Death" there is further psychological implication. Another image of the cypress occurs in "De Gustibus":

And one sharp tree - 'tis a cypress - stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit -o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. (III, 175-76)

The particular details of this description will have echoes in "Childe Roland." Another male image which recurs in that poem is the horn of a

bull, used to describe the position of the villa, stuck on the edge of a mountain in "Up At A Villa"

One of the most evocative images in Men and Women occurs in the same poem, where a plant becomes a metaphor of the female body. In describing the setting of the villa, the speaker conveys the extreme, intense and quick growth which characterizes the sudden arrival of summer, and he climaxes it with these lines:

'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen
 three fingers well,
 The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its
 great red bell
 Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children
 to pick and sell. (III, 156)

Without giving a word by word explication of these lines, it is clear that the speaker's sense of suffocation, while made manifest in the fertile landscape, actually exists in him; he dislikes its very life. J. K. Bonnell, in discussing Browning's touch imagery, refers to this same stanza:

In such lines as these the poet projects his own personality into the things described, so that when he says the tulip blows out its great red bell, we have a feeling of active growth rather than the mere surface appearance of the flower.¹⁵

Having already referred to the Hopkinsque quality of selving, we might look at the next stanza, which besides using animal imagery, conveys the feeling of life, being, intensity:

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain
 to spout and splash!
 In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine
 such foam-bows flash
 On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance
 and paddle and pash
 Round the lady atop in her conch - fifty gazers
 do not abash,
 Though all that she wears is some weeds round
 her waist in a sort of sash. (III, 157)

It is ironic that in image and content the speaker clearly reveals that life is more real to him when it is created by man, and virtually static. The horse and the fish are both symbols of virility.

Another poem which contains effective use of landscape to portray body is "A Lover's Quarrel." Here the speaker, a man, is imagining with his mistress what the Pampas would be like. But they are content to live "blocked-up with snow" in their ingle, where the outside world can only invade through books and newspapers:

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
Miles and miles of gold and green
Where the sunflowers blow
In a solid glow,
And - to break now and then the screen -
Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between! (III, 150)

The horse here is a symbol of masculinity and unleashed force, ironic when we consider that their love seems threatened by freedom, and must remain tamed. In "Fra Lippo Lippi" the "old mill horse" is a domesticated beast, but he still enjoys sensual pleasures, with no fear of the future, no hypocrisy, no repression, and of course no consciousness. In a different context the horse will be seen to have central importance in "Childe Roland."

The power and prowess of the animal in man is again seen in "An Epistle . . . of Karshish," only the figure of the lynx has greater potential for lust and destruction than the horse:

A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
(IV, 90, 29-31)

Park Honan, in his study of Browning's characters, interprets these lines in the following way:

Karshish relates that he has defeated the lynx in quick combat, crying and throwing his stick; the lynx had met its equal, for its own "lust" and "yellow balls"¹⁶ symbolically reflect the passionate intensity of Karshish himself.

Karshish indeed recognizes the animal in himself; the diction is deliberately sexual in connotation, and the difficult consonant sounds connote the frustration of the animal's potential. But I would put the emphasis on the threat the lynx offers to Karshish, and the fear with which the physician reacts. For this becomes meaningful when he also disperses mentally the threat of God embodied on earth, which Lazarus presents to him with the presence of his body brought back to life by Christ. Ironically, the man of medicine whose language is of the flesh fears the unknown powers of the body.¹⁷

There are parallel passages combining insect and plant imagery in a sensual description in the two poems "Woman and Roses" and "Popularity." In the first of these there is a feeling of being drawn in and nearly drowned in physical sensation:

Deep, as drops from a statue's plinth
The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
So will I bury me while burning,
Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
Eye in your eyes, lips on your lips. (III, 241)

We are reminded of the lovers in "Love Among the Ruins" who, when they meet, will embrace first with their eyes, and then "extinguish sight and speech / Each on each" (III, 148). In the bee-flower union in "Woman and Roses," the man identifies with the bee and the woman he dreams of is his

flower, which is the natural metaphor. But there is a reversal of these roles in "Popularity":

Enough to furnish Solomon
 Such hangings for his cedar-house,
 That, when gold-robed he took the throne
 In that abyss of blue, the Spouse
 Might swear his presence shone
 Most like the centre-spike of gold
 Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,
 What time, with ardours manifold,
 The bee goes singing to her groom,
 Drunken and overbold. (III, 250-51)

However, although the bee would seem to be the bride going to Solomon on his throne, and the spike or king is male, we see that the throne is a womb, like that of a flower. The flower is both male and female then. The ambiguity of this total image may be due to the theme of the poem, which is the relation of the artist to his creation. The "blue" is the dye taken from the sea whelks, and it is a metaphor for the pure, rich, natural material which is the substance of John Keats' poetry.

David, at the opening of "Saul," is described as the pre-Raphaelite boy, the imagery making him an object of beauty and desire:

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's
 child with his dew
 "On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still
 living and blue
 "Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as
 if no wild heat
 "Were now raging to torture the desert!"
 (III, 179, 11-14)

It is Abner who is uttering these words of welcome, but on behalf of the sick king, towards whom David's role must be active; he must arouse Saul with his music and tempting words. At a certain juncture in the poem

Saul does rise out of his lethargy and it is David who is in the passive position:

Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above
his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me,
like oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers.

(III, 192, 222-25)

The lamb suggests Christ, but David has not yet had his vision of the coming of God to earth, with the infinite possibilities of man, and Saul, being born anew.

Two major poems among the dramatic lyrics in Men and Women are "By the Fire-Side" and "Two in the Campagna," to which we have referred in connection with specific image categories. Because they do exemplify most of the particular qualities of Browning's imagery, and more important, because they focus the theme of the good moment in love and the infinite moment, it is essential to end this chapter with a close examination of the two poems, in conjunction with each other.

Some of the most effective and deliberate passages of sexual imagery involving plants and landscape occur in "By the Fire-Side." A moment should first be taken to place the passages in the framework of the poem. The narrator, more closely identified with Browning than in most of the other poems, imagines himself in his life's autumn, recalling the good moment which has transformed his life. (At present, this moment is in the very immediate past.) This journey into the past becomes the conscious quest for that one moment which focusses the past, gives meaning

to the present, and orders the future. Again, it will be valuable to compare this quest with the one in "Childe Roland." The landscape which is recalled evokes the psychological and physical moment of perfect union. From the vistas of Italy, that "woman-country" wooed and loved by "earth's male-lands," with the tower, mill and iron forge, and the ruined chapel in the distance, the panorama suddenly narrows until, "A turn, and we stand in the heart of things." Everything becomes immediate, crowding in on the man and woman. The thread of trickling water, like the spider's web in "Two in the Campagna," is the link between disconnected thoughts. It is a natural stream, as opposed to the fountain in Cleon's garden "Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow / Thin from her tube" (IV, 167, 252-53); the compression of the great river into this thread is analogous to the repression of Cleon's life and art into narrow, artificial channels. The path which must be taken in "By the Fire-Side" is a narrow one between the gorge and the "straight-up rock," and is kept:

By boulder-stones where lichens mock
 The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
 Their teeth to the polished block. (III, 203, 48-50)

With this sense of plants taking on animal characteristics, we move to the explicit passages focussing the patterns of sexual imagery we have been noting throughout this chapter:

XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
 And thorny balls, each three in one,
 The chestnuts throw on our path in showers:
 For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun
 These early November hours,

XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
 Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,

O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
 And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
 Elf-needed mat of moss,

XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
 Last evening - nay, in to-day's first dew
 Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
 Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew
 Of toadstools peep indulged.

(III, 203, 51-65)

In the speaker's eyes, the moment of fulfillment which he feels is near is matched in the landscape which is fruitful, sensual and violent. The "thorny balls, each three in one," suggest the Trinity, as well as being symbolic of the male, and are matched by the particular plant imagery which evokes the female body, suddenly ripened and emergent, like the landscape in "Up In A Villa - Down In the City." The knowledge comes for the man and woman that the perfect moment is imminent, as they cross the bridge after having examined the chapel, with its little bit of primitive fresco:

XXXVII

Oh moment, one and infinite!
 The water slips o'er stock and stone;
 The West is tender, hardly bright:
 How grey at once is the evening grown -
 One star, the chrysolite!

(III, 208, 181-85)

This is the infinitesimal, infinite moment, which if taken will prove life, if lost will be lost forever. It means the difference between contentment and bliss, being friends and lovers. Both man and woman must be conscious; the speaker could not touch the "last leaf," for it must fall of its own accord. The moment cannot be forced. A man would

strive, agonize and taste hell, "For the hope of such a prize!" which is just the difference between the man here and the lovers in "The Statue and the Bust," who failed to act. William Whitla calls the event the "perfect integration of the good minute," the life of significant love which has become for the speaker his "mode of knowledge," motivating his actions and ennobling his being.¹⁸ The moment in a physical sense is only that, and immediately the sense of suspension disappears, the feeling of unity with nature:

XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen
 Were hanging the night around us fast;
 But we knew that a bar was broken between
 Life and life; we were mixed at last
 In spite of the mortal screen. (III, 210, 231-35)

But the ability of the man and woman to act at the propitious moment has made it infinite in its influence on the remainder of their lives. The immortality of the moment is in part dependent on the memory of the two concerned and in the man's articulation of what the moment has meant and will mean in the years to come. But image and idea reach a unity, an atonement in this poem, which parallels the oneness of the two travellers through the Italian setting.

The imagery of the senses in plants and insects evokes a similar mood in "Two In the Campagna" but something is lacking and the "good moment" does not work. The stanza which begins the spider web image we have already used to introduce this chapter. Now we follow the thread with the lover and his mistress:

III

Help me to hold it! First it left
 The yellowing fennel, run to seed
 There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
 Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
 Took up the floating weft,

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
 Five beetles, - blind and green they grope
 Among the honey-meal: and last,
 Everywhere on the grassy slope
 I traced it. Hold it fast!

(III, 218)

The "thought" or the web catches on to weeds and to the ruins of man's structures. There is no purpose to its path, but for the man, the purpose of his thoughts is a driving desire to articulate and catch the good moment. Perhaps in the very imagery of the stanzas which the man speaks the clue to his flaw is there. His consciousness dwells on himself; it is he who is to conceptualize the experience. The "small orange cup" is female imagery such as we found in "By the Fire-Side." But it does not evoke the sense of fulfillment which was found in that autumn setting. For the desire for sensation here is a groping quest "Among the honey-meal," carried out by five blind beetles, rather than a total awareness that the land and the lovers are ready to act, to make the physical moment infinite. Here, the moment is realized when the rose is plucked, but it disappears, leaving a sense of loss. The flaw could of course be in the woman, who withholds something, so that their souls do not mingle. They are like the beetles, groping blindly, but failing somehow in the sensual-spiritual experience. The "thistle-ball" has a different connotation than the "thorny balls; each three in one"

of the previous poem, as the speaker asks himself:

Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

(III, 220)

In contrast, there is "One star," the woman, to guide the speaker in "By the Fire-Side" after the infinite moment is realized. In "Two In the Campagna" the position is immortalized for all time in its unfulfillment, for the fleshly barrier between man's desire and its attainment is not broken:

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern -
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

(III, 220)

Whitla sums up this poem in the following fashion: "The lover strives to hold fast to the love that motivates him, but the barrier of the two selves seems to interrupt the insight that should be shared."¹⁹ They only have the yearning, but never achieve the moment of union because of selfishness, while "The love which comes from incarnational individuality gives all, gives up all, and forgives all."²⁰ Thus, in more orthodox terms an action of the self is required, and we are once more reminded of Hopkins creative concepts of "selving" and "individuation." Where there is perfect union the moment becomes eternity, which is analogous with the union of human and divine in the Incarnation. But it is also analogous with the oneness of image and idea. A more particular discussion of the relation between

image and Incarnation will appear later.

Thus, through the myriad paths and patterns of Browning's imagery in Men and Women we have followed, sometimes blindly, but perhaps with increasing vision and perception, the thread the spider weaves. The task now is to reach the centre of the web, by devoting ourselves to the poem which seems to stand apart in all of Browning's writing, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." We began our specific discussion of imagery with a passage from "Fra Lippo Lippi," a poem with artistic and religious themes; and we ended it with a perusal of two love poems. Now in our quest, I hope to show that we are not leaving the track completely by devoting ourselves to a poem which at first glance seems to allude neither to art, religion or love. In imagery it is indeed linked to all three.

CHAPTER III

THE DARK TOWER

Thus I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band" - to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps - that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now - should I be fit? (III, 406, 37-42)

The theme which immediately presents itself to us from this stanza is that of the quest. It is true that this is not a theme which explicitly concerns us, but it is an underlying one for much of the foregoing discussion of imagery and its meaning. The web which the spider weaves, our motif for Chapter II, is really a minute metaphor for the quest or search for the infinite moment, or the perfect answer to an inarticulated riddle. Again, in "By the Fire-Side" the action involves a personal quest through very real country to discover the good minute, in the heart as well as in nature. Always, in tracing out such quests, we have been involved in our chosen imagery of animals and plants. And we shall soon find ourselves immersed in these patterns as we try to follow the quest in "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." For the moment, however, a certain amount of background needs to be provided.

What is the history of this quest in terms of Browning's source material? It is not our purpose to discover exactly what gave Browning the conscious idea for the total poem and every individual scene within the poem. However, we can refer to some of the essential allusions and their possible antecedents. We know that the title of the poem is taken

from Edgar's speech in King Lear:

"Child Roland to the dark tower came;
His word was still, 'Fie, foh, and fum,
I smell the blood of a British man.'"¹

Although the second and third lines do not have an immediate bearing on "Childe Roland," we must not dismiss their meaning in our unveiling of this poem.²

While we are on the track of Edgar's speech in King Lear, it seems folly to overlook other possible connections between the rest of the scene in which he appears as Mad Tom, and "Childe Roland." They are doubly appropriate because of the intense concentration of animal images within the lines. The "hoary cripple" who directs Roland onto the tract which should contain the Dark Tower may be related to Tom's "foul fiend":

Who gives anything to poor Tom? whom the foul fiend hath led through fire
and through flame, and through ford and whirlpool o'er bog and quagmire
.

Only the fire is absent from Roland's journey as a physical fact, but even it is present by suggestion. The transformation of his landscape must have been the work of a moody fool, again akin to the foul fiend, with the river described as a bath for the "fiend's glowing hoof." Water populated by horrid creatures was not unfamiliar to Poor Tom,

...that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt, and
the water; that in the fury of his heart, when the foul fiend rages, eats
cawdung for salads; swallows the old rat and the ditch dog; drinks the
green mantle of the standing pool⁴

Finally there are the famous string of animal characteristics which Edgar, as Tom, attributes to himself, having parallels in the images of lust and frustration in "Childe Roland": "Wine loved I dearly, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramour'd the Turk: false of heart, light of ear, bloody

of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey."⁵ Roland, like the "Band" who have gone before him, has also left his former life to test himself in this strange quest, as Edgar is tested when confronted with his secret nature while on the heath.

We have been looking at some speculative sources for the imagery in "Childe Roland." However we have more positive evidence which Browning himself has given us, through the research carried out by DeVane in A Browning Handbook. DeVane calls the poem a fantasy or nightmare; it was written the day after "Women and Roses" which is a dream, and the day before "Love Among the Ruins" which is a reminiscence. Knowing this, a parallel seems to show itself between these three kinds of dreams, and "The place of solitude where three dreams cross" from Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday."⁶ The solitude appears in contrast to the verdant garden in the world above, and Frye calls the three dreams "apparently the dreams of waking consciousness, memory, and dream proper, all of them animated by desire, all of them having no ending but death."⁷ It may be carrying the parallel too far to match each of the dreams with one of Browning's poems in a one-to-one correspondence. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that the three are contained in the one, namely "Childe Roland," with its close connections with desire and death. The desert is indeed the other side of the rose-garden as we mentioned in discussing "Woman and Roses," and is, like the solitude of "Ash-Wednesday," "a place of thirst, in contrast to the fountains and springs of the garden" Of course there is a river in "Childe Roland" but its characteristics are spite and death, not beneficence and fertility. Death

means many things, however, in terms of the landscape and of the persona, all of which must be considered.

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," although its shape is conventional, presents the disconnected imagery and action of a dream, in a sense is a reminiscence of the unconscious, and is therefore linked integrally with "Woman and Roses" and "Love Among the Ruins." However, it is completely unique, related to all of Men and Women more as a key unlocking doors to mysterious passages. Geoffrey Hartman writes, in his introductory essay to Hopkins:

In both Hopkins and Browning the lyric moves away from simple reflection or reminiscence. The dreamer is lifted into the dream, the past into the present. Imitation is project more than retrospect.

These words do give an indication of the relationship between poet and poem. Browning claimed that he was "conscious of no allegorical intention" in "Childe Roland."¹⁰ Rather it was a dream which he had to write down, much as Coleridge had to write "Kubla Khan." From DeVane we also learn that some of the images were suggested to Browning from his having read Gerard de Lairese's The Art of Painting in All Its Branches. In this book were listed the subjects considered horrible and undesirable in painting: "the old cripple, the pathless field, the desperate vegetation, the spiteful little river, the killing of the water-rat, the enclosing mountains, the leering sunset, and many other details . . ."¹¹ But Browning's use of these images is imaginative rather than prosaic, symbolic as well as visual. As a verbal painting then, this poem could be called a landscape of the unconscious. It is clear that the knight's "journey

across the devastated landscape must be treated as experience, because it cannot be judged morally or logically."¹² Certainly, there is no obvious pattern, no conventional morality. Instead, everything in the journey, the scenery, people, animals and objects encountered, appears to be contradictory.

The imagery is archetypally that of the quest as well as alluding to specific quests in literature. (Two such literary sources are Malory's tale of Gareth and La Chanson de Roland.)¹³ There are many images of the wasteland: the "hoary cripple" who directs the narrator, the other knights who have gone before and failed, the long wanderings over many years, imagery of water and fire to suggest death and purging, the tower, the blighted and sick wilderness, itself an antithesis of the garden of Eden. It is the desert which once was a garden, innocence transformed by experience. Curtis Dahl has subjected "Childe Roland" to this level of interpretation in his essay "The Victorian Wasteland." He relates the poem to other wasteland poems, emphasizing the courage, the need to go on at any cost, the physical nature of the trials, as Childe Roland traverses the "barren waste that lies in the shadow of the valley of death."¹⁴ For Dahl, the landscape is almost incidental to the positive outlook of Roland, undaunted, here by choice, directed to a definite goal and not spiritually deprived. While this reading would seem to overlook the significance of Roland's vision and the reason he sees as he does, the stressing of the physical obstacles leads us in the direction of body imagery and Incarnation which will culminate our understanding of Browning's total vision in Men and Women.

Having briefly encountered the background for this poem then, it is time for an extended analysis of the images which have been focussed upon in the previous chapter. It is here that we will see them come together in such a way as to make a psychoanalytical reading not just another level, but an essential insight into the artistic unconscious and the deep meaning of this and other poems. The two stanzas which follow do, it is true, bring to mind a wasteland picture, with Nature as an indifferent surveyor of what she is not responsible for. However, it will be shown that these passages, and others to be discussed in their turn, contain more than a metaphor for a spiritual wasteland; rather they are manifestations of the unconscious desires of the persona, shown paradoxically by the dialectic, the negative which somehow affirms the positive. Here Childe Roland pursues his path across the plain, having left the formal road at the instigation of the "hoary cripple":

So, on I went. I think I never saw
 Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
 For flowers - as well expect a cedar grove!
 But cockle, spurge, according to their law
 Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
 You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
 In some strange sort, were the land's portion.
 "See
 "Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
 "It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
 "'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure
 this place,
 "Calcine its clods and set my prisoners
 free. (55-66)

The landscape is a negative one then, harsh and unkind, in the eyes of the questor. The fire that can purge this blight reminds us of Eliot's

"Death by Fire." However, Roland is not one of the prisoners to be set free; he has entered freely into this land, and can go where he has to. Physical freedom does not mean free-will, of course, and the landscape acts on him even as he creates it to some extent, luring him to the end goal.

To see the conscious way Browning has used landscape to evoke mood, one must only contrast it with the landscape in "By the Fire-Side." In that poem, where the quest is positive and successful, the plant life is mature, fruitful, sensuous and evocative of desire fulfilled. In "Childe Roland" the rare plants which do appear take on vicious human characteristics, and appear emasculated rather than virile:

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
 Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
 Were jealous else. What made those hole and rents
 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
 All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
 Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents. (67-72)

The sound of the consonants echoes the sense of the passage, with many obstacles preventing smooth enunciation. There are clear suggestions of rape of the land by the "brute", who is never identified, but who has symbolic and psychological implications, and is, as we mentioned, possibly related to Mad Tom's "foul fiend." The sexual impotency and sterility in nature is conveyed further by these lines, which again present a sharp contrast to the stanzas evoking the body in "By the Fire-Side ":

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
 In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
 Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
(73-75)

Here sickness and horror are conveyed in the human images.

Roland's journey is one without logical direction, and ungoverned by time in a chronological sense. The landscape changes suddenly, as it would in a dream, without the speaker's having seemed to move:

A sudden little river crossed my path
 As unexpected as a serpent comes.
 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
 For the fiend's glowing hoof - to see the wrath
 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and
 spumes.

(109-114)

There are immediate parallels with The Waste Land where the river recurs throughout, conveying many meanings. The river is a symbol for the path-way of the unconscious; there have been other rivers and many paths in the poems of this volume, but none so angry, so possessed of a dark or evil force. It is like the serpent who left the garden no longer a paradise. And we will see that this land has been blighted by the forbidden fruit of knowledge. As the "old mill-horse" in "Fra Lippo Lippi" is the most important animal image for a revelation of theme, suggesting the unconscious enjoyment of life for its own sake through the senses, so is the horse a focussing symbol in "Childe Roland." However, this horse is dying and mechanical; his masculinity has become impotent:

One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
 Stood stupified, however he came there:
 Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
 With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
 I never saw a brute I hated so;
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain. (76-84)

As we noted earlier, the cypress in "De Gustibus-" is physically very like this horse, for it is "red-rusted, / Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'er crusted" (III, 175). In a sense, every image in "Childe Roland" is death-like, every figure or portion of the landscape is only a different visual projection of the same fantasy of the mind. The river, the horse, the landscape are all harsh and brutal. Why must the horse be "wicked," or "deserve" such pain? Why is he such an object of hatred for Roland? When crossing the river, where willows fling themselves "in a fit / Of mute despair, a suicidal throng," he fears to step on a dead man's cheek, or is horrified when he strikes something in the water:

- It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek. (125-26)

We have already seen that Poor Tom "swallows the old rat" in the stagnant pool. And there is the drowned Phoenecian sailor of The Waste Land as well as the river rat of this passage from 'The Fire Sermon':

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.¹⁵

Rats in Eliot's poetry are underworld characters associated with death and disease.¹⁶

Everything, then, is seen in terms of death. On the opposite bank of the river, where Roland had hoped to find a better country, the landscape is beaten and battle-scarred:

Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage - (129-32)

The color red brings associations with the "Red leer" which the dying day "shot" out as Roland ventured on the plain, with the gaunt red horse, as well as with the "red sullen faces" which "sneer and snarl / From doors of mudcracked houses" in The Waste Land.¹⁷ If the lynx in "An Epistle . . . of Karshish" suggests the potential of sexual strength and forces of the unconscious ready to be unleashed, the animal images here of toads and wild cats in terrible captivity would symbolize frustration to the point of madness. There are implications that war has ravaged this land, a war resulting from desires sublimated and rendered impotent, the psychological inferences of which shall be investigated.

That this is a diseased country through which the knight-errant journeys is already evident. There is another stanza to substantiate the physical human sickness in this unnatural nature, which ends in a death image with the grim personification of the oak tree:

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
 Broke into moss or substances like boils;
 Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
 Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils. (151-56)

The first half of this stanza recalls the setting which was the meeting place between Karshish and Lazarus, that figure who has seen death, and who is forever halfway between life and death. Karshish writes in his letter:

I met him thus -
 I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
 Like an old lion's cheek-teeth. Out there came
 A moon made like a face with certain spots
 Multiform, manifold, and menacing:

(IV, 97, 290-94)

In "Childe Roland" too, sharp hills will appear in the landscape. It is also interesting to note, in connection with Lazarus, that there is a three-stanza simile in "Childe Roland" involving a man who hovers between life and death, listening to his friends speeding up his demise in their conversation, much as in Donne's "A Valédiction: Forbidding Mourning."

The imagery continues to present a state of purgatory, even of an inferno, and the knight is "as far as ever from the end!" With no warning, however, the first portent of success, a "great black bird, Apollyon's bosom friend" sails past, perhaps his guide. (About "Burnt Norton," Frye writes, "a thrush first leads us into and then drives us out of the rose-garden, and a raven appears in the corresponding section of The Family Reunion."¹⁸) The plain gives way to mountains which come into focus as if they had been there always:

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when -
 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
 As when a trap shuts - you're inside the den! (169-74)

He, like the wild cat he imagined, is also in a trap. It is significant that there have been images of enclosure and imprisonment throughout Men and Women, such as this stanza from "Holy Cross Day" (with the subtitle "On Which the Jews Were Forced to Attend an Annual Christian Sermon in Rome"):

Higgledy piggledy, packed we lie,
 Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,
 Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
 Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve. (III, 386, 13-16)

But the trap Roland is in will prove, paradoxically, the means of his deliverance, his freedom.

The climax of the poem is reached in these stanzas in which the revelation comes to Roland, when the knowledge gained from experience suddenly focusses on this one moment, not the moment in the promised land of an Eden but an equally valuable one:

Burningly it came on me all at once,
 This was the place! those two hills on the right
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
 While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
 Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
 After a life spent training for the sight! (175-80)

With the end of his quest upon him, whether failure or success, the language is once more sexual in connotation, as he sees hills like animals, and later like giant men. His vision throughout has been strangely anthropomorphic, attributing as he does the baser human characteristics to all the elements of the landscape. What is it he has discovered, at the heart of his dark journey? The object is revealed to us through a rhetorical question:

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
 That round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
 In the whole world.

(181-84)

The tower has the blindness of ignorance again a human quality, yet it is this tower for which Childe Roland has left the main thoroughfare and risked everything. Why, we may ask, if in itself it has nothing to reveal? In connotation the tower is a religious and sexual symbol, and epitomizes the dual nature of the quest. But in appearance, although

"without a counterpart," it is singularly nondescript, assuming little more visual significance than the tower in the landscape of "By the Fire-Side," where a quest of an apparently different nature was successful.

It is a tower of another kind which will help reveal the meaning of the Dark Tower. In "Cleon" we learn that the king Protos is building a tower which is a monument to art and civilization. It leads the poet-philosopher Cleon to investigate his own and Protos's views of progress, the latter as revealed in the letter:

"Let progress end at once, man make no step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense." (IV, 222-24)

But man has taken so many steps above the "inconscious forms of life," over the "brute's head," that he is no longer advancing, but is dying in soul and body, as Cleon cleverly describes:

This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas!
The soul now climbs it just to perish there,
For thence we have discovered ('tis no dream -
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,
And still the flesh replies, "Take no joy more
"Than ere you climbed the tower to look abroad!
"Nay, so much less, as that fatigue has brought
"Deduction to it."

(IV, 231-45)

The passage continues with an affirmation that our life is inadequate to our capacity for joy, which is ever unfulfilled, the more so the higher our sensibilities are developed. We see a god's joy, in this case that of

Zeus, but we can only know man's.

The imperfectibility of man as a source of his anguish, his finite longing for the infinite, and the barrier of the fleshly screen, are states of man's existence which have recurred throughout Men and Women: in poems of art such as "Andrea del Sarto"; in the love poems "The Last Ride Together" and "Two In the Campagna"; in the religious monologues "Saul," "An Epistle ... of Karshish" and here in "Cleon." And on the unconscious level all these conditions are present in "Childe Roland." The tower which Cleon uses as his metaphor, his image, is less visual and more abstract than the Dark Tower. But in the context of the philosophic argument suggesting as it does the split between soul and body, it is not really far removed in its symbolism, for this same dichotomy is responsible for the projected images in Childe Roland's landscape. However, we shall see that the tower for Roland becomes the center of a moment of unification, an atonement of body and soul.¹⁹ It is important to see this whole section from "Cleon" as a corollary piece to the passage from "Fra Lippo Lippi," our starting point in Chapter I. And it is most clearly a poetic statement of Nietzsche's Dionysiac-Apollonian-Socratic theory in The Birth of Tragedy, which develops into a whole theory of art.

Having mentioned the interrelationship of "Childe Roland" with "Cleon" and other major poems, we will leave this problem for the moment to re-examine our key poem in the light of Norman O. Brown's interpretations of Freud and Nietzsche, especially as he relates them

to art in the chapters "Art and Eros," "Apollo and Dionysus" and "The Resurrection of the Body." We should reiterate that much of the analysis of animal and plant imagery has already been aided quite naturally by what Freud has presented to us on the sexual nature of symbolism. However, we are neither limited to such an interpretation, nor need we read into Browning anything that he was not conscious of himself, both poetically and psychologically. This applies then, to the following analysis of "Childe Roland," a study which shall at the same time extend beyond its bounds to the whole of our discussion of imagery as it relates to theme in Men and Women.

We began by speaking of the quest and the landscape in "Childe Roland" as being negations of all other landscapes, of natural life, and of quests with a positive goal. The goal here is failure, and some kind of death; to end will be success enough. Freud describes negation as follows:

' . . . a way of taking account of what is repressed; indeed, it is actually a removal of the repression, though not . . . an acceptance of what is repressed Negation only assists in undoing one of the consequences of repression, - namely the fact that the subject-matter of the image in question is unable to enter consciousness.'²⁰

Desexualization, which we see in the landscape of "Childe Roland," and sublimations, are both negations of bodily Eros. That is, the body is really affirmed by its negation. (In the present discussion it is the narrator, the "I" of the poem, of whom we speak as manifesting these symptoms. The relationship of the poet Browning to his poem will be considered later.) Desexualization is an "intrinsic character . . . of the energy constituting the ego, and . . . is the consequence of

substituting for bodily erotic union with the world the vain, shadowy project of having the world within the self."²¹ The energy is redirected outward by the ego in the form of sublimations.

"Childe Roland" is a fantasy and a dream. And the "I" of the poem refers, in a stanza quoted above, to the feeling that his experience is a bad dream of something which has happened to him before. This expression of a dream of a reminiscence fits in very well with Brown's explanation of fantasy. It is the mechanism whereby the body-ego becomes a soul, and only a "substitute-gratification" for the instinctual demands of the id, which seeks bodily erotic union with the world. The fantasy is regressive, which would explain the quest in "Childe Roland" seeming to go back to what has happened before, a substitution of the past for the present. During his trip through the unconscious, Childe Roland passes all the stages of his life, if we look at the fear he holds of spearing a baby, or of stepping on a dead man in the river, as being symbolic killings of himself to leave him free for the present. Also the old cripple could be seen as a projection of Roland's own crippled psyche which he both fears and hates. In recognizing it even in this disguised form, he is ready to step out into the wilderness which will lead to a cure. There is also a conscious recollection of the past, of the knights who went before, but it seems worse than the present nightmare to Roland, so he puts it out of his mind. By negation, fantasy identifies past and present. It "constitutes the hidden affirmative content behind every formal negation (including repression)."²² Brown

continues:

It is through fantasy that the ego introjects lost objects and makes identifications. Identifications as modes of installing the Other inside the Self are fantasies. Identifications, as masks worn by the ego to substitute itself for reality and endear itself to the id, are fantasies. By the same token, fantasies are those images already present in the ego which the ego in its cognitive function is seeking to rediscover in reality.²³

"Childe Roland" is certainly not unique among the poems in Men and Women in using identifications to find lost objects of childhood and other unaccepted losses, but the particular nature of the identification is more revealing than in the other poems. That there are child longings is shown by its title, taken as we said from Edgar's speech in King Lear, but probably having roots in ancient children's rhymes, and in old ballads of the archetypal child pattern. There is another poem which uses a phrase from that particular nursery rhyme:

Could but November come,
 Were the noisy birds struck dumb
 At the warning slash
 Of his driver's lash -
 I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
 Facing the castle glum
 And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

(III, 153, 127-33)

This stanza is from "A Lover's Quarrel" and it is important to note its context. The lover wishes to seal his love up again so that no outside forces can disturb it; in essence however it reads as a death-wish, a desire to live in fantasy.

We noted the lack of conventional logic in the development of "Childe Roland," the manner in which each encounter seems unconnected with the one preceding it, and in which objects and landscape seem to contradict each other. Brown comments on this phenomenon in an important section

of "The Resurrection of the Body." He summarizes Freud's psychoanalysis of negation in which negation and no! do not exist for the id:

Instead of the law of contradiction we find a unity of opposites: "Dreams show a special tendency to reduce two opposites to a unity"; "Any thing in a dream may mean its opposite." We must therefore entertain the hypothesis that there is an important connection between being "dialectical" and dreaming, just as there is between dreaming and poetry or mysticism.²⁴

Brown explains further that "Freud's essay 'On Negation' may throw light on the nature of the 'dialectical' dissatisfaction with formal logic."²⁵

Through negation, as we have seen, the repression is accepted in another form:

We may therefore entertain the hypothesis that formal logic and the law of contradiction are the rules whereby the mind submits to operate under general conditions of repression. As with the concept of time, Kant's categories of rationality would then turn out to be the categories of repression. And conversely, 'dialectical' would be the struggle of the mind to circumvent repression and make the unconscious conscious. But by the same token, it would be the struggle of the mind to overcome the split and conflict within itself.²⁶

Thus the ego attempts to synthesize, which in a sense is what happens to

Childe Roland, who in the progress of his quest draws all the contradictions of the unconscious mind into the open plain of the landscape, and forces them together.

In Brown's statements about the symbolism of fantasy we find ourselves again making connections with all the images we have discussed so far, and not limiting ourselves to those in "Childe Roland":

Fantasy, as a hallucination of what is not there dialectically negating what is there, confers on reality a hidden level of meaning, and lends a symbolical quality to all experience. The animal symbolicum (Cassirer's definition of man) is animal sublimans, committed to substitute symbolical gratification of instincts for real gratification, the desexualized animal. By the same token the animal symbolicum is the animal which has lost its

world and life, and which preserves in its symbol systems a map of the lost reality, guiding the search to recover it. Thus, as Ferenczi said, the tendency to rediscover what is loved in all the things of the hostile outer world is the primitive source of symbolism. And Freud's analysis of words as a halfway house on the road back to things discloses the substitutive and provisional status of the life of symbolic satisfactions. Sublimations satisfy the instincts to the same degree as maps satisfy the desire to travel. The animal symbolicum is enacting fantasies, man still unable to find a path to real instinctual gratification, and therefore still caught in the dream solution discovered in infancy.²⁷

If the quest in "Childe Roland" is in some sense a visualization of this psychological phenomenon, then the questor comes to stand for the predicament of modern man, and the search is man's search in miniature, the quest for his lost self.

We questioned the need Roland had to accuse the jaded horse of wickedness, as the reason it deserved such pain. This attribution of evil and the necessary punishment reveals much about the persona if we examine Freud's interpretations of dreams, as discussed by Brown in the chapter "The Disease Called Man":

On the one hand, dreams, neurotic symptoms, and all other manifestations of the unconscious, such as fantasy, represent in some degree or other a flight or alienation from a reality which is found unbearable. On the other hand, they represent a return to the pleasure-principle; they are substitutes for pleasures denied by reality. In this compromise between the two conflicting systems, the pleasure desired is reduced or distorted or even transformed to pain. Under the conditions of repression, under the domination of the reality-principle, the pursuit of pleasure is degraded to the status of a symptom.²⁸

The horse, then, may not be so far removed from Lippo's "old mill horse" who enjoys an unconscious sensual life; the pain and punishment are projections of Roland's own feelings of guilt for pleasure, desired or attained, such as the knights who went before him and failed had

experienced. The reason for negation and sublimation can be found in a poetic expression also, in the line from the rose-garden episode of "Burnt-Norton": "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality."²⁹

These are the words of the bird driving us out of the garden; ironically the reality of paradise is harder to bear than the reality of experience.

The narrator of "Childe Roland" is wandering through a cultural wasteland, a wilderness which is the result of division between body and soul through the process of civilization. Specifically, this is due to the removal of the body-ego into the "watch-tower of the soul," so that we live a dream of a dream.

As life restricted to the seen, and by hallucinatory projection seen at a distance, and veiled by negation and distorted by symbolism, sublimation perpetuates and elaborates the infantile solution, the dream.

If the mechanism of sublimation is the dream, the instinctual economy which sustains it is a primacy of death over life in the ego.³⁰

The narrator in Browning's poem sees death over life in all things, but it is not just his projection; rather it is civilization's mass projection. How has destruction and decay come about if the very bodily forces which would cause it have been sublimated? Freud provides an answer which Brown elaborates:

'After sublimation the erotic component no longer has the power to bind the whole of the destructive elements that were previously combined with it, and these are released in the form of inclinations to aggression and destruction.' Thus the path of cumulative sublimation is also the path of cumulative aggression and guilt, aggression being the revolt of the baffled instincts against the desexualized and inadequate world,³¹ and guilt being the revolt against the desexualized and inadequate self.

Thus the brute who has injured and destroyed nature is what Nietzsche would call the "witches' brew" of Dionysus,³² caused by the forces of that god

being repressed and unconscious so that they break loose in aggression and other acts which have the form of civilization but are hiding more destruction than any form of barbarism or primitivism.

Here we may substitute the terminology then, and bring Nietzsche into what has seemed a Freudian outlook. Apollo in Greek civilization was the god of form, "of plastic form in art, of rational form in thought, of civilized form in life."³³ It is form as the negation of instinct and matter, therefore it is ultimately deathly form. Apollo's world is the world of sunlight, which is the sexual symbol of sublimation, of seeing only, but not using the other senses. The structure of the ego of modern man is Apollonian; it thinks rather than acts, and seeks to repress any suggestion of evil, the dark shadow behind the form. Gradually we have the situation as stated in "Cleon": man using not his senses, but his "sense of sense." There are two types of consciousness then. Man has been made over-conscious of his intellect, of what sets him apart from the beasts. What he must become conscious of is the Dionysiac reality, the life force, the process, which lies behind the death-wish and the form. Cleon's predicament is made apparent when he extols the virtues of civilization and his particular contributions to culture, yet expresses dissatisfaction which he cannot fully explain. Man suffers from over-cultivation of the mind, which is a parallel to the natural metaphor Cleon uses:

The wild flower was the larger; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wind, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large:

(IV, 147-51)

Cleon's own desire for perfection rests on his wish for immortality. In his perfect state, as an animal, he lived totally in the senses. However, without consciousness he was not able to realize his perfection. Ironically, knowledge gave him insight into the tremendous gap between man's limited potential and his unlimited desire, a desire born of his place between the gods and the animals, with the freedom of neither. Recognizing the mortality of his body he can no longer enjoy life, but lives in fear of death. Indeed, his very desire for perfection is a seeking for an end to life.

And here we see Childe Roland's position, for the entire landscape is a projection of his death-fear, in truth his death-wish. The last image in nature before the trap shuts is a grotesque mask of death which repulses the protagonist. What is the answer, for Cleon or for Roland? Philosophically there cannot be a final answer. But religiously, psychologically and poetically there is an answer which is a paradox. Childe Roland in his dream-state has partially discovered it, and in the last "scene" has completed his quest in a perverse way.

We have seen from the plant and animal imagery which Browning uses, apart from its symbolic significance, that the particular and individual object is focussed upon. Symbolically, many of the images portray the human body, as we especially discovered in discussing sexual imagery. Not only the sense of sight, but all the senses, including the very bodily tactile sense, have been evoked. And in theme, one could say generally that the primitive, instinctive and bestial has been the point

of view of the sympathetic persona rather than the civilized, cultured and saintly. In nearly all the major monologues, and in "Childe Roland," the speaker identifies himself at some point with the beasts. In "Up At a Villa - Down in the City" the man complains that "up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast" (III, 155). Both Bishop Bloughram and Fra Lippo Lippi affirm, not without pride, that they are beasts, meaning that they are the animal man, made of flesh and blood, and will not pretend otherwise. There is a slight twist to the application of the term "beast" in "An Epistle . . . of Karshish"; the physician uses it to describe Lazarus, the man who having experienced the perfection attainable only in death, cannot live more than a death-in-life existence back on imperfect earth. In "Cleon" we have already noted the passage advocating that man stay natural, the "better beast." Saul, at the beginning of that poem, is a blind and dumb animal, who can no longer enjoy sensual pleasures, until wooed and reawakened by David's songs and invocations to life. And we have found that suppressing the senses will create the brute who merely exists, as does the ancient horse projected in all his misery by Roland, who, even though he professes hatred, has unconscious feelings of guilt and fear.

Where does this lead us? Surely not to the point where we once more affirm that man is no more than an animal. He is indeed more than this. But if he cannot enjoy the pleasures of the animal, he is in a less favourable position in the universe. Brown quotes the words of Thoreau:

'We need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life. Our present senses are but rudiment of what they are destined to become.'³⁴

It is perhaps simple to find support from Nietzsche and Freud for a total immersion, consciously, in the senses, so that everyone is developed to his potential. Is this not what Cleon desires, except that he knows the consequences are death? There is another answer, at his fingertips so to speak, which would overcome, or be integrated with, this last obstacle to man's happiness. For some of those monologues which extol the beast in man have as their central theme the Incarnation. And by implication it is included in the other monologues and dramatic lyrics, as William Whitla notes in The Central Truth:

Writing from the interpretation of his own experience, Browning had developed a rather existential doctrine of love that he applied to test experience, and so to test life. The individualism which he had found in the Incarnation as the first crisis of history, and again in the Renaissance as the second crisis, is to be merged in unselfish love for another in the crisis moment of this present life, and in love for God in the next.³⁵

As we stated in Chapter I, Whitla leaves out "Childe Roland" in his scheme, and he ignores, in his orthodox treatment of Incarnation, the way it extends itself into the poetic process. He does say it is analogous to the poetic process:

For the Christian poet the Incarnation is the symbol incarnate of which all other symbols in literature are but imitations. It is by analogy with this act of God that the poet may attempt to create - to give flesh to his words as God did to the Word.³⁶

But if the Incarnation is the embodiment of God, then the Incarnation is body, and the poetic process is to embody the spirit, the soul. Rather than Whitla's emphasis on individuality we should see the affirmation of

atonement, in which the flesh is no longer a barrier to the spirit. God exists as a psychological necessity for Browning, Whitla tells us, and with this Norman O. Brown agrees. A god who would take on human form is attesting to the perfection within its limits of the human body; Zeus could not provide this affirmation for Cleon, nor could Karshish's all-powerful but not all-loving God. It is David who presents the implications of this new God most sensually, for the shepherd-poet is neither a sceptical scientist nor a cultured rationalist, as he envisions the fleshification of the Word:

"As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty
 be proved
 "Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being
 Beloved!
 "He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest
 shall stand the most weak.
 " 'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for!
 my flesh that I seek
 "In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul,
 it shall be
 "A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man
 like to me,
 "Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever:
 A Hand like this hand
 "Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
 See the Christ stand!"

(III, 197, 305-12)

This is the completion in an infinite moment of the perfect animal state of man, the answer to the division between soul and body. And the Word is Love, made incarnate, with its implications of grace, forgiveness, a new innocence after a terrible experience, immortality in the body. The new life which will be Saul's if this gift is given is the equivalent of the life-force, Eros, taking over from the now dominant death-wish:

"Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain
 at the height
 "This perfection, - succeed with life's dayspring,
 death's minute of night?
 "Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul
 the mistake,
 "Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now, - and
 bid him awake
 "From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to
 find himself set
 "Clear and safe in new light and new life
 (III, 195, 277-82)

Explicitly, the "new life" David means is an awakening from life which is a dream to immortal life after death; psychologically, however, the lines are a statement of rebirth into this world.

How, then, does "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" become a poem focussed on Incarnation? It is because of the nature of Roland's quest, which began with a desire to succeed, to attain perfection, but gradually changed to a desire for death. It is because through the negation of the landscape, he affirmed those pleasures which had been his guilty burden. And finally, he went into the trap which was of his own making, just as was the whole wasteland journey, and with a click the whole meaning of his quest appeared as a vision. He was able then to affirm life through a dauntless acceptance of death. This is shown as much in the landscape as in his action. At the moment when time crosses eternity, as it did for the lovers in "By the Fire-Side," all Nature is affirming the experience. In "Saul," the sudden knowledge which comes intuitively to David that God will bring love to earth in His own body produces a sort of vertigo, as if the world were turning at the point of commitment, of total immersion of self. All the beasts

and birds are stiff with terror and awe, yet there is a feeling of ecstasy in the moment:

In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the
 sudden wind-thrills;
 In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with
 eye sidling still
 Though averted with wonder and dread; in the
 birds stiff and chill
 That rose heavily, as I approached them, made
 stupid with awe:
 E'en the serpent that slid away silent, - he felt the
 new law.
 The same stared in the white humid faces upturned
 by the flowers;
 The same worked in the heart of the cedar and
 moved the vine-bowers:

(III, 198-99, 327-33)

Once again the images are anthropomorphic, as they are in the dramatic ending of "Childe Roland" when the whole universe is stirring:

Not see? because of night perhaps? - Why, day
 Come back again for that! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay, -
 "Now stab and end the creature - to the heft!"
 (187-92)

He is only a creature to the forces of nature, no different than those who went before him, who were traitors or suffered other disgraces. Although this moment of his seeming demise, as a victim, seems not like an incarnational moment of love, it is a moment of revelation, like the apocalypse.³⁷ He stands ready to accept "death's minute of night" (for this is the infinite moment here) in the fiery frame of the mountains, which appear as the faces of all the knights, his archetypal family of man:

Nor hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers, -

 There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
 To view the last of me, a living frame
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
 And blew "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."
 (193-204)

There is a moment, if no more, of Dionysiac ecstasy. Is it because he
 has strived and agonized to reach a goal, even if the goal is death?

Norman O. Brown would bear out this interpretation, for he writes:

The death instinct is reconciled with the life instinct only in a life
 which is not repressed, which leaves no "unlived lines" in the human
 body, the death instinct then being affirmed in a body which is willing
 to die. And, because the body is satisfied, the death instinct no
 longer drives it to change itself and make history, and therefore,
 as Christian theology divined, its activity is in eternity.³⁸

And from Nietzsche via Brown in his eclectic "happening" Love's Body:

Dionysus, the mad god, breaks down the boundaries; releases the prisoners;
 abolishes repression; and abolishes the principium individuationis,³⁹
 substituting for it the unity of man and the unity of man with nature.

Thus we are brought face to face with the fact of Browning's
 affirmation of nature through the almost infinite variety and occurrence
 of his animal and plant imagery, to embody the various personae of his
 poems and the ideas they convey. But the final linkage with
 the New Testament would perhaps be Brown's psychoanalytic version in the
 same paragraph with this passage: "He that findeth his own psyche shall
 lose it, and he that loseth his psyche for my sake shall find it."⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

CLOSING THE RING

Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss -
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say, -
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts
about?

He with a "look you" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the table and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all, -
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

(IV, 80)

This passage from "Transcendentalism: A Poem In Twelve Books" seems to be an affirmation of the role of the poet which contains by implication all the discoveries about the imagery in Browning's Men and Women which have evolved. Browning himself had been criticized for moving from the position of poet who seeks for "images and melody" to the kind of poet who presents "reason" and "thought." This poem is an answer. In it he contrasts Boehme, the Protestant mystic of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with an obscure poet. The poet has been able to capture the essence of the rose in one image, while it has taken the philosopher many hard volumes. What value is it that Boehme discovered "plants could speak" and the "daisy had an eye indeed," if in reading his long colloquies we look up to find the "summer past?" Browning ends with these words addressed to his brother "poet" the harpist:

So come, the harp back to your heart again!
You are a poem, though your poem's naught.
The best of all you showed before, believe,

Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords
 Bent, following the cherub at the top
 That points to God with his paired half-moon wings. (IV, 80)

It is the poet's place, then, to sing, to drape "naked thought" in "sights and sounds." The poem becomes the incarnation of the word, the fleshification of thought. (See Roma King, Jr.: "Meaning is that end produced by the union of matter and structure; it is matter completely, satisfyingly expressed, an incarnation in structure.")¹

However, there is a beautiful irony in Browning's choice of Boehme to illustrate image and idea obscured by "long prolusion." For Norman O. Brown, in his chapter "The Resurrection of the Body," reintroduces us to Boehme as the "theologian of the resurrected body," whose "position in the Western tradition of mystic hope of better things is central and assured,"² who influenced Blake, Novalis and Hegel, thus is connected through the centuries to Freud. "Boehme, like Freud, understands death not as a mere nothing but as a positive force either in dialectical conflict with life (in fallen man), or dialectically unified with life (in God's perfection)."³ In the numerous passages we have examined from "Saul" it is certainly the second condition of death that David has been able to project and affirm, for he can see perfection, and God, "In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod" (III, 194,250). We can safely say that what Boehme discovered and wished to express in numerous tomes was that which Browning expressed poetically. The mystic and the poet are not polar opposites.

George Santayana, in his essay "The Poetry of Barbarism," has

charged Browning with "the failure in rationality and the indifference to perfection," of portraying characters who are too realistic, "quite like men and women in actual life,"⁴ of boasting through the mouths of his personae with an almost "muscular Christianity" his exultation in lust and passion.⁵ There is a sense in which Santayana is inadvertently true in all his statements. We, too, in the development of this thesis have implicitly aligned Browning with the barbarians. However, it is not a charge, a judgement of poetic failure and imperfection, in our case. We can answer each of the individual criticisms Santayana makes of Browning, then, by agreeing with the literal words but not the spirit of such an understanding.

The body of Men and Women as we have explored it has indeed been real; Santayana's judgement in this case can only be turned about to read as a favourable comment. The charge of "indifference to perfection" is one which can be met with in two ways. One can look at Browning's theory of the imperfect, carried over in some measure from Ruskin's aesthetic writings. Great art is not art which is technically perfect, as "Andrea del Sarto" so aptly demonstrates. In his Essay on Shelley Browning gives what he considers art's true function, we see from Whitla's paraphrase:

The artist's task in creating the work of art is to raise the beholder to the point of vision too Art is to have a moral effect on civilization in both Ruskin's and Browning's views. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, and must order their laws wisely. Perfection in law as in life or art means death. Once it is attained, there is no more moral striving for that which is unattained. When art strives and reaches perfection in technique, then there has to be a decline in creative power. Vigour turns into elaboration; design becomes ornamen-

tation; beauty is replaced by the grotesque. So it is in morality, and so, Browning held, it is in religion. Karshish saw that Lazarus had perfect knowledge and so his life was already in effect ended. Doubt had been removed from his horizon⁶ to be replaced by certainty; he lived a passive death-in-life existence.

In this interpretaion there are implied some serious allegations which would need to be closely examined. However, our concern rests with the link which may be seen between the perfection - imperfection theme and the psychological and religious insights we have discovered in our discussion of imagery.

Just as over-consciousness on one kind can be deadly, and can prevent the "infinite moment" from happening, so can perfection be, then, the means to a "death-in-life existence." But there is also a way of understanding the potential of perfection and total awareness in a hopeful, beneficent sense. Various personae whom we have encountered in Men and Women have despaired at man ever attaining God's perfection in terms of His omniscience and omnipotence. But in the Godhead putting on flesh, becoming man, there is a new hope and possibility of man's perfection. This is implicit in the mysticism of Boehme and the psychology of Freud, according to Brown. And the French writer André Gide, who was concerned with personal rebirth through the new god Dionysus or the new God Christ, numbered Browning in his "four-starred constellation" in the company of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Blake. What was it they held in common? According to one critic, "All four were concerned with the problem of good and evil, of the existence of God, of the possibilities of man, and of motivation; and in all four Gide saw what is most conspicuous in the case

of Browning - a will to optimism."⁷ As optimism is used here it is an imputation which can stand, for it is not the "easy" optimism with which Browning was so often accredited. Rather it is one stemming from what we have seen Herford call "the mystic's exultation" and the "psychologist's cool penetrating scrutiny" with which Browning approaches love, the source of his hope.

Browning is a "barbarian" if we see him as a critic of his civilization, a criticism paralleling that offered by Brown as he draws on the full implications of Freud's writings. The reality of maintaining what is is replaced by the need to affirm the body and life. While we have seen the body symbolized so often in plant and animal imagery, the body itself is a symbol for the unconscious.⁸ In Life Against Death, Brown stresses another overlapping of Christian theology and psychoanalysis; "the resurrected body is the transfigured body."⁹ This affirmation as we have seen follows directly from our reading of Childe Roland's journey through his unconscious, and by extension through the unconscious of Victorian man. And Brown takes the step for us of incorporating the poet into the midst of the problem:

Modern poetry, like psychoanalysis and Protestant theology, faces the problem of the resurrection of the body. Art and poetry have always been altering our ways of sensing and feeling - that is to say, altering the human body. And Whitehead rightly discerns as the essence of the 'Romantic Reaction' a revulsion against abstraction (in psychoanalytical terms, sublimation) in favour of the concrete sensual organism, the human body. 'Energy is the only life, and is from the Body Energy is Eternal Delight,' says Blake.¹⁰

Brown cites Geoffry Hartman, a critic whom we have referred to in comparing Hopkins and Browning, as positing a new kind of criticism "for which poetry

is an experience both mystical and bodily."¹¹ In his book The Unmediated Vision, Hartman "has traced the persistent quest in modern poetry for the resurrection of the body."¹² From our study we can now attest that Browning is one of the pioneers in this quest.

We have seen one critic's opinion that Browning believed poets to be the legislators of the world. And this view is again expressed by Hartman in his introductory lecture to Hopkins: "The athletic games are sublimated war games, but the game of poetry, equally skilled, may civilize the gods."¹³ And for Brown, too, play is the thing:

The life instinct, or sexual instinct, demands activity of a kind that, in contrast to our current mode of activity, can only be called play. The life instinct also demands a union with others and with the world around us based not¹⁴ on anxiety and aggression but on narcissism and erotic exuberance.

The perfect body, which is symbolically the Dark Tower at the end of Childe Roland's quest, is the body reconciled with death. He reaches this state through his willingness to face the broken, dismembered body of himself, which the landscape truly symbolizes. The affirmation of the body was brought about by a complete immersion in the "destructive element" leading to Roland's final Dionysiac experience of fire and noise and whirling motion, culminating in his undaunted blowing of the slug-horn, a play action. It is made a religious experience through its psychological connection with the moment of the Incarnation, and is related to love through the concept of the "infinite moment." It is ultimately linked to both, however, in the imagery which weaves the pattern throughout the body of Men and Women.

And where does the artist Browning fit into the scheme? Not where Santayana places him when he says of Browning: "His imagination, like the imagination we have in dreams, was merely a vent for personal preoccupations."¹⁵ Rather, the artist who has articulated the dream is removed from the dreamer: "Art differs from dreaming not only because it makes the unconscious conscious - a purely cognitive relation - but also because it liberates repressed instincts - a libidinal relation."¹⁶ Artists have never lost their childhood being, hence they have never ceased to recognize their roots in the dark unconscious. The acknowledgement that art liberates repressed instincts brings us to the place of beginning in our ring of men and women, namely the passage quoted in Chapter I above from "Fra Lippo Lippi." Although we defined the categories of imagery contained therein, we did not isolate the relevant themes. Some of these have already emerged in our reading of "Childe Roland" but it is essential to bring them together here.

Lippo claims that life is too big "to pass for a dream" which is an answer to Santayana. He will defy it as does Childe Roland and "play the fooleries" in which he has just been caught "In pure rage!" The lines which follow are probably the greatest claims made for the instincts in Men and Women, moved as this renegade monk is by the psychological and artistic importance of what he says. His analogy of the "old mill-horse, out at grass" is a poetical statement of the mystic's belief in "the possibility of human perfectibility and the hope of finding a way out of the human neurosis into that simple health that animals enjoy, but not man."¹⁷ And in Fra Lippo's obvious understanding of repression and its

effects in this passage, we have a complete justification for involving the Freudian approach which Brown takes, as a parallel to Browning's own remarkable insight. For according to Brown, the later Freud "in his doctrine of anxiety is moving toward the position that man is the animal which represses himself and which creates culture or society in order to repress himself."¹⁸ And finally in this section of "Fra Lippo Lippi" we have the affirmation of the body in the very moment of its creation in Eden, before the Fall. Throughout the poem, too, the artist-monk has been concerned with expressing the affinity between body and soul, not their dichotomy. The role of the artist for Lippo is to "Interpret God to all of you!" which is as Browning suggests in "Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books." And for Fra Lippo Lippi,

This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

. (IV, 113, 313-15)

To find the kingdom in one's own body, and to find one's own body in the outside world. The body to be realized is the body of the cosmic man, the body of the universe as one perfect man. The word that is incarnate in Christ is the word that is incarnate in the universe by the creative fiat; it is the logos of the universe now recapitulated in the divine-human body.¹⁹

Thus the resurrection of the body, the infinite moment, and eternal life, must have to exist now and in this world, not in a flight from death to another world. And the ring of men and women whom we have encountered are the incarnation in flesh of Browning's poetic creativity, to be reborn as often as the body of poetry is examined anew.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹All quotations from the poems in Men and Women are from Works of Robert Browning, ed. F.G. Kenyon, 10 vols. Notations in parentheses will be in each case the volume number, page number, and the line number(s) where lineation is found in the text.

²Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, 91.

³All fifty-one poems will not be dealt with individually but except for the closet drama "In a Balcony," all are implicitly relevant to this thesis.

⁴DeVane, A Browning Handbook, 187.

⁵Whitla, The Central Truth, 61.

⁶Herford, Robert Browning, 133.

⁷Brown, Life Against Death, xi.

⁸Ibid., 62, quoted from Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, 44.

⁹Ibid., xii.

¹⁰Ibid., 56, quoted from Trilling, 57, 60.

¹¹Hearn, Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets, 260-61.

¹²DeVane, A Browning Handbook, 187, quoting from a letter Browning wrote.

Chapter I

¹Herford, Robert Browning, 242.

²Johnson, An Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, 93.

³Herford, Robert Browning, 244.

⁴Bonnell, "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning," 579.

⁵Ibid., 584.

⁶For instance Brockington, (Browning and the Twentieth Century, 11) quotes a letter of Browning's saying that his interest in men and women is in the soul, (with reference to Sordello): "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of the soul: little else is worth study."

⁷Herford, Robert Browning, 243-44.

⁸Langbaum, Poetry of Experience, 88.

⁹For a preliminary justification for treating landscape as the unconscious see, for example, Norman O. Brown (Love's Body, 227): "The body that is identical with environment. As in dreams the whole landscape is made out of the dreamer's own body; so in totemism the human essence is projected into animal or plant - the very act of unconscious symbol-formation."

¹⁰See Wallace Stevens' "Peter Quince at the Clavier": "Beauty is momentary in the mind - / The fitful tracing of a portal; / But in the flesh it is immortal."

¹¹For Whitla's charting of the major monologues according to the kinds and degrees of love involved, (Cupiditas, The Incarnation or Caritas, and Amor), see the fold-out opposite page 100 in The Central Truth.

¹²Whitla, The Central Truth, 10.

¹³Eliot, Four Quartets, 14. Eliot conveys this theme of incarnate time continually in his poetry, as in these lines from "Choruses from 'The Rock'" (Selected Poems, 119):

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in
time and of time,

A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call
history: transecting, bisecting the world of time, a
moment in time but not like a moment of time,

A moment in time but time was made through that moment:
for without the meaning there is no time, and
that moment of time gave the meaning.

In Eliot's conception of it, the moment of the Incarnation is repeated again and again in every man's life.

¹⁴Hartman, "Introduction: Poetry and Justification," from Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays, 13.

¹⁵Langbaum, Poetry of Experience, 183.

Chapter II

¹Miller, "The Univocal Chiming," Hopkins, ed. Hartman, 97.

²Because imagery of this kind is not bound by time, but is traditional, I feel there is justification in drawing allusions, at appropriate passages, to images which create a similar effect in the poetry of T.S. Eliot. Thus, these lines from "Up In A Villa - Down In the City" could be called "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" ("Gerontion," Selected Poems, 33). The landscape which in Browning's poem seems limited to the speaker's own state of mind becomes part of mankind's unconscious in The Waste Land. Insects play a parallel role, however, in this passage from "The Burial of the Dead," (Selected Poems, 51):

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

The relationship will be seen to be more complete in Browning's "waste land" poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."

³Eliot, Selected Poems, 126.

⁴Again, it has been suggested that Browning is mocking his critics, the "British Public" who do not understand him. If we consider The Ring and the Book, does not the pure gold, truth, remain after all the intricacies of the alloy have been investigated and refined out? Is "Master Hugues" another metaphor of the poetic process? Or is the gold or truth not more likely to be found in the intricacies themselves? Eliot in The Waste Land (Selected Poems, 67), speaks of "memories draped by the beneficent spider," thus using the web to hide something other than gold.

⁵Eliot, Selected Poems, 33.

⁶ A similar evocation of the senses is found in "A Game of Chess" from The Waste Land, and there is a mesmerized quality to the atmosphere as the woman of society sits at her toilette (Selected Poems, 54-55):

. . . staring forms

Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

⁷ On the significance of touch, it is worth noting McLuhan's remark (The Gutenberg Galaxy, 65): "I would suggest that "touch" is not so much a separate sense as the very interplay of the senses." William Blake connected "touch" with "taste" in the figure of Tharmas in The Four Zoas and it is about this figure that Northrop Frye comments (Fearful Symmetry, 281), "The chief imaginative use of the sense of contact is in sexual love on the plane of Beulah which is in the region of Tharmas."

⁸ Bonnell, "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning," 575.

⁹ There is, for example, the symbolism of the rose in "Ash-Wednesday" (Selected Poems, 86): "Rose of memory / Rose of forgetfulness" and "The single Rose / Is now the Garden / Where all loves end."

¹⁰ Frye alludes specifically to the history of the process: "Many seventeenth-century writers were fascinated by a curious experiment of burning a flower, usually a rose, to ashes, and seeing the ghost of the flower hovering over the ashes, which apparently afforded a dubious argument for immortality, or at least, the permanence of things in time" (T.S. Eliot, 88). Also see Four Quartets, page 56, for an allusion to the "sceptre of a Rose" in "Little Gidding"

¹¹ Four Quartets, 59.

¹² See Roma King's discussion of this poem in "Eve and the Virgin," The Bow and the Lyre, 11-31, for further insight into imagery.

¹³ Blake, of course, identified city with woman in two contrasting pairs: Jerusalem as city and bride, on the one hand; London as city and harlot, on the other. Nature as "female will" takes on the characteristics of Eve as temptress. It is interesting to notice too that Blake identified body and temple. "The true Ark of God is the human body, as Jesus implied when he identified his body with the temple." (Frye, Fearful Symmetry, 368).

¹⁴The extended image of the snake in Part X of Eliot's "Choruses from 'The Rock'" (although pertaining to the Visible Church) is apt, when we consider Saul as the old, experienced king (Selected Poems, 125):

The great snake lies ever half awake, at the bottom of
the pit of the world, curled
In folds of himself until he awakens in hunger and
moving his head to right and to left prepares for
his hour to devour.

¹⁵Bonnell, "Touch Images In the Poetry of Robert Browning," 576.

¹⁶Honan, Browning's Characters, 149. Also see pp. 173-74 for other animal imagery in "An Epistle . . . of Karshish."

¹⁷Honan indirectly gives strength to my argument when he points out the fire and light images which recur throughout "A Death In the Desert" in reference to Christ and the truth he presents. For one of the allusions is to Christ's eyes as "flame" (Browning's Characters, 199).

Also, one should allude to the seeming dichotomy between the tiger in Eliot's "Gerontion," in Frye's view a symbol of Antichrist, of wrath, the eternal spiritual opposition of the world of Christ; and the leopards in "Ash Wednesday," which, "however terrifying, are really agents of redemption" (T.S. Eliot, 56, 76).

¹⁸Whitla, The Central Truth, 95.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 95.

Chapter III

¹King Lear, III, iv, 187-89.

²See Harold Golder's article "Browning's 'Childe Roland,'" PMLA, XXXIX (1924), 963-87, for possible sources for this poem.

³King Lear, III, iv, 51-54.

⁴*Ibid.*, III, iv, 134-39.

⁵Ibid., III, iv, 93-97.

⁶Eliot, Selected Poems, 92.

⁷Frye, T.S. Eliot, 74.

⁸Ibid., 74.

⁹Hartman, Hopkins, 13.

¹⁰DeVane, A Browning Handbook, 229.

¹¹Ibid., 206.

¹²Langbaum, Poetry of Experience, 192.

¹³See Lionel Stevenson's discovery of these overlooked sources in "The Pertinacious Victorian Poets," Victorian Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, 23-24.

¹⁴Dahl, "The Victorian Wasteland," Victorian Literature, 34.

¹⁵Eliot, Selected Poems, 58.

¹⁶For a modern poet who uses myriad animal images to give his message one should investigate Theodore Roethke. In connection with the rat and river symbols alone there are many significant examples from such poems as "The Lost Son" and "Praise to the End," also involving personal quests. Roethke is a poet who affirms creation and the body; witness the evocative passage from "The Lost Son" (Collected Poems, 54):

Hunting along the river,
Down among the rubbish, the bug-riddled foliage,
By the muddy pond-edge, by the bog-holes,
By the shrunken lake, hunting, in the heat of summer.
The shape of a rat?
It's bigger than that.
It's less than a leg
And more than a nose,
Just under the water
It usually goes.

The sections following this deal with a death-wish in terms of animals, and with sexual frustrations and alienation, culminating with the weeds, snakes and other elements of nature crying to the protagonist 'Die.' But he, like Roland, survives his trials. Whether our questor also has the consequential rebirth of "The Lost Son" we shall have to explore.

¹⁷Eliot, Selected Poems, 64.

¹⁸Frye, T.S. Eliot, 56.

¹⁹The tower image as centre or focus of the body-soul dualism and imagined reconciliation is paralleled in Tennyson, especially in "The Palace of Art." Its implications are explored in Yeats's "The Tower" and "Dialogue of Self and Soul." It relates to temple and city images: Yeat's Byzantium, Blake's Golgonooza, Shelley's "architectural descriptions" (see Milton Wilson, Shelley's Later Poetry, 117 and 311). We have noted earlier the Biblical identification of body and temple. See also Freud's identification of the dream image of house with body (General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis, 160,171).

²⁰Brown, Life Against Death, 160. Quoting from Freud, Collected Papers V.

²¹Ibid., 162.

²²Ibid., 164.

²³Ibid., 164.

²⁴Ibid., 320, with references to The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud (Dreams) 345-45; New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, 99; Collected Papers III, 559n.; Collected Papers IV, 119, 184; Collected Papers V, 185. The second quotation is from Collected Papers IV, 184; Basic Writings (Dreams), 346.

²⁵Ibid., 321.

²⁶Ibid., 321.

²⁷Ibid., 167-68.

²⁸Ibid., 9.

²⁹Eliot, Four Quartets, 14.

³⁰Brown, Life Against Death, 173.

³¹Ibid., 174, also quoting from Freud, The Ego and the Id.

³²Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 26.

³³Brown, Life Against Death, 174.

³⁴Ibid., 308, quoting from Thoreau, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.

³⁵Whitla, The Central Truth, 98.

³⁶Ibid., 10.

³⁷"The real apocalypse comes, not with the vision of a city or kingdom, which would still be external, but with the identification of the city and kingdom with one's own body" (Frye, Fearful Symmetry, 431). It could be said, then, that the real apocalypse comes for Childe Roland when the dismembered body of the landscape takes its final shape, the tower, or risen body.

³⁸Brown, Life Against Death, 308.

³⁹Brown, Love's Body, 161.

⁴⁰Ibid., 61, (Matthew X, 39).

Conclusion

¹King, The Bow and the Lyre, 9.

²Brown, Life Against Death, 310.

³Ibid., 310.

⁴Santayana, "The Poetry of Barbarism," Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, 189.

⁵Ibid., 197.

⁶Whitla, The Central Truth, 68.

⁷March, Gide and The Hound of Heaven, 258.

⁸For the paradoxical meaning of the body see Brown, (Love's Body, 224): "To return the word to the flesh. To make knowledge carnal again; not by deduction, but immediate by perception or sense at once; the bodily senses." Then, "Incarnation is not to be understood carnally, for to be carnally-minded is death; that is to say, the body is not to be understood literally."

⁹Brown, Life Against Death, 308.

¹⁰Ibid., 312.

¹¹Ibid., 312

¹²Ibid., 312.

¹³Hartman, Hopkins, 13.

¹⁴Brown, Life Against Death, 307.

¹⁵Santayana, "The Poetry of Barbarism," 194.

¹⁶Brown, Life Against Death, 63.

¹⁷Ibid., 311.

¹⁸Ibid., 9.

¹⁹Brown, Love's Body, 226.

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Abbreviations

JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology

MLN: Modern Language Notes

PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association

QQ: Queen's Quarterly

TQ: University of Toronto Quarterly

VP: Victorian Poetry

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